











## **AN OUTLINE OF INDIAN CULTURE**



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## **A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY**

When Columbus discovered America he thought he had discovered India. Vasco da Gama put him right but to this day the people found living in America by European settlers are erroneously called Indians although it has long since been recognised that they were not and are not one people but many. The real India was discovered subsequently and called East India to avoid confusion but the inclusion of Indonesia and Indo-China and other territories with which the East India Companies traded only made it worse. Jamaica and other islands off the coast of America are still called the West Indies. The term Hindu came to be used to designate the people of the Indian sub-continent proper to distinguish them from those who lived in neighbouring territories historically known as part of East India. At the outset it had no religious connotation. An outsider may still be heard to say, by way of introduction, "This Hindu gentleman is a Muslim". In the Arabian countries the term 'Hindi' is preferred. The appellation described the people of Hindustan in general, Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and Christian alike. Neither Hindi nor Hindu has, in this larger sense, any denominational connotations.

Iqbal called himself a Hindi while Tagore favoured the use of Hindu in this significantly inclusive meaning. Neither poet identified it with a creed. It applied to those belonging to India and was a synonym for Indian.

Militants in both the Islamic and Hindu folds, unfortunately, insisted upon giving it a religious identity and laid stress upon it to the exclusion of its older and more generalised

import. Even a person as eminent as Ramananda Chatterji (1865-1943) betrays some confusion. He defines the word 'Hindu' as meaning a person whose religion originated in India and was, therefore, indigenous. Both Islam and Christianity originated outside India. Neither a Muslim nor a Christian could, therefore, be a Hindu, although both could, of course, be Indians. This attitude found wide acceptance but it led eventually to a split between Muslims and Hindus. The advocates of the two-nation theory which brought about the partition of the country based their claim for a separate homeland upon it. The name of this separate homeland was Pakistan. The rest of the country was re-defined as that part of the sub-continent allotted to Hindus. The word Hindustan took on a new meaning. As a territorial and political unity India was given no importance. 'Hindustan' was bracketed with 'Pakistan' throughout the negotiations for a transfer of power. Congress leaders, however, insisted upon retaining the name 'India'. By 'India' was now meant India minus Pakistan. The British Parliament respected their wishes in the Act of Indian Independence. 'India' does not have a religious connotation. 'Pakistan' does. All the inhabitants of Indian territory are Indians irrespective of creed. Citizens of India are free to believe and practise any religion they choose or no religion if they prefer. Pakistan, by definition, is a land of Muslims by faith.

'India' and 'Hind' are words derived from 'Indus' and 'Sindhu'. They have the same source. 'India' found favour with the Greeks and other Europeans while 'Hind' gained currency in the countries of the Middle East long before the rise of either Christianity or Islam. The people of India have therefore received their name from the Indus valley. The civilisation that flourished there as early as 2500 B.C. and perhaps earlier is one of the oldest civilisations in the world, having come into existence before the Chinese and after the Sumerian and Egyptian.

The Indus valley civilisation, being pre-Aryan, was also pre-Vedic. If it is to be called Hindu the term has to be understood in the sense of pre-Vedic Hindu, i.e. pre-Aryan Indian. This applies to religion also.

India was inhabited long before the advent of the Aryan-speaking newcomers just as Europe was inhabited before Aryan-

speaking invaders overran it. This Aryan intrusion probably began with a slow process of infiltration. It lasted many centuries. Successive waves spread through many countries, from Ireland to Aryavarta, beginning around 1500 B.C. Aryavarta was the name by which Northern India was known. Initially the word 'Aryan' did not identify race. It is not unlikely that the Aryan invaders were of diverse racial origin. Some may even have come to India earlier, speaking other languages. It is a more accurate description of these latter people to say they were more Aryan by speech than Aryan by blood.

This must be emphasised. Language should not be confused with race no matter what the history books say or whatever myths a Hitlerite mentality may fabricate to our universal sorrow. We all suffer from the same racial bias when we equate language with race.

The Indus valley civilisation appears to have been an urban civilisation of which the principal cities were Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. The Aryans founded no cities in the Indus valley. The existence of cities before the Aryans came was not known fifty years ago. A new dimension was added to Indian history by excavations that began accidentally. Up till that time India's history had been blindly interpreted from the standpoint of Aryan superiority. We now know beyond all doubt that the earlier civilisation was no less advanced than the Aryan according to international standards. How it met its end we cannot know until more excavation and research throw some light upon it. It is clear the Aryans did not linger in the Indus valley. They moved eastwards, calling the territory they entered Aryavarta, claiming it as their own. The land was watered by the holy Ganges, the Jamuna and the Saraswati. The Aryans felt secure in this fertile and sheltered place. The local people apparently allowed them to set themselves up as a new master race. The lords temporal and spiritual were Aryan and a hierarchy made up of merchants, craftsmen, peasants and labourers supported them. There were numerous occupational castes. Earlier languages survived as local dialects but the predominant language was Aryan. It was used for official purposes. This lingua franca was slowly standardised and purified. In the process it became Sanskrit. Sanskrit was to India what Latin was to Europe but it retained its



supremacy far longer. Every aspect of India's rich and multifarious cultural life and thought was influenced by it. In their unrefined forms India's languages were tolerated but not developed. They were known as the Prakrits and were largely Pre-Aryanised. Other languages, of Dravidian and similar stock, were spoken in the outer sectors of India and were mistakenly assumed to derive from racial differences. That all Indian languages took their rise from Vedic Sanskrit is another myth that has caused much mischief. A third myth propagates the erroneous belief that all Indian religious denominations derive from the Vedas and are rooted in them. Indians have always been and are multiple in race, multiple in religion and multiple in the languages they speak. Diversity has been the hallmark of our civilisation.

Around the first century B.C. Aryavarta was the heartland of India being the inmost of a series of zonal circles. Punjab, Sind, Gandhara or Afghanistan, and Kashmir formed an outer circle on the North-west, an area that was considered unholy for it was contaminated by the 'unclean' races from the Asian mainland or from Persia. Persia or Iran was also Aryan. There was, however, a deadly hostility between the Indo-Aryans and the Iranian Aryans.

Bengal, Assam and the hilly tracts along their borders comprised a circle on the Northeast, also outside the pale. This area was considered unholy because of a Mongolian element. It preponderated. The Aryans never conquered the people of these regions by physical force. Buddhist and Jain monks, through religious and cultural conversion, won them over. These monks penetrated into the remotest areas without fear of defilement.

There is good reason to believe the Indus civilisation extended southwards, as well as eastwards and northwards. The existence of a third outer circle on the South-west can be safely assumed. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Malwa would have been part of it. These areas flourished. Overseas trade may not have been crippled by Aryan taboos at that time. Certain parts may have come under the sway of Aryan princes but it is likely that, if they did, these princes were softened in their turn by cultural and religious influences. Buddhism and Jainism were inspired religions of great and enduring vitality.

Neither was incompatible with the Vedic Aryan culture of the rulers. The heirarchical structure of the society, based on the four vocational *varnas*, was probably adopted in outlying areas not long after it was established in the heart of the country, Aryavarta.

South of Vindhya mountain range lay a fourth outer circle which stretched right across central India. The hills and forests of Vidarbha, Mahakoshala and Kalinga cut this area off from the North, putting the people well beyond the pale of Aryan civilisation. They were presumably unaffected by the Indus valley civilisation. It is here that we find the hard core of pre-historic India. It has still to yield its secrets to the archaeologist but the pre-Aryans of Kalinga could not have fought Asoka as successfully as they did if they had been strangers to the art of war and if their needs had not been supplied by a strong agricultural and industrial base. They had access to the sea and there is every likelihood of their having overseas contacts beneficial to trade. Buddhism and Jainism were both absorbed into the general culture of the people in course of time. Their domestication was followed by development and change. The Aryanised ruling classes were in search of a Kshatriya genealogy that would both link and equate them with the prestigious lunar and solar dynasties of the North. The Brahmins were invited to reside in their courts to give them an aura of culture.

There was a second inner circle also in the South, formed by the Dravidian-speaking peoples. The Dravidians had a long and independent evolution. Geography effectively isolated them from the North. Living between two seas and walled off from the rest of the sub-continent by mountains they took naturally and inevitably to water travel. Water routes were far less hazardous than dangerous passages through precipitous mountains infested with outlaws. No national highways existed and none were built until much later. There may have been trails which ran along the coast but boats provided both safer and more comfortable ways of getting from one place to another. The Indo-Aryans were a landlocked people and had always been one; the inhabitants of Aryavarta in particular were extremely conservative in this respect. It was not for them to teach civilisation to the wealthy and powerful South.

The South was never conquered by force of arms. Buddhism and Jainism were slow in moving South and did not begin to exert an influence until much later. The *varna* pattern of society and the hierarchical social structure came afterwards, not before. The Dravidian languages retained their identity in the face of Sanskrit. They must have been highly developed to do so. A time came when the armies of the South marched Northwards and some came as far as the Bhagirathi river. The Sen dynasty of Bengal came from the South. Many of India's great religious leaders originated there, winning recognition and veneration in the North in course of time. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata spanned the continent long before the railways did.

The Jatakas must not be overlooked. The cave paintings of Ajanta illustrate Jataka stories. Friends who had visited Thailand told me they had seen a Buddhist temple of the medieval period with illustrations from the Jatakas on one side and illustrations from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata on the other. In India's Ellora caves we find Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanic sculpture side by side. All three were Aryan religions. It is generally taken for granted that the Aryans had only one religion, that of the Vedas. The Aryans of Iran think otherwise. Not all the Aryans in India thought so either. The spirit of the times is best demonstrated by the Ellora sculptures. In ancient India the acceptance of the Vedas was optional. People could dissent if they wished. The question of choice remained open for many hundreds of years. When the door was shut its closure worked to the disadvantage of the Jainas and Buddhists. According to Jaina lore there were teachers before Mahavira. According to Buddhist lore there were teachers before Gautama. If so, these two great religions were more or less co-eval with the Vedic. In the course of the ten centuries from 1500 B.C. to 500 B.C. the seeds of religious dissension sown among the Indo-Aryans at the very inception of these great creeds grew into mighty trees and assumed vast proportions.

The spread of Buddhism from the Aryavarta heartland to the outlying areas of India and beyond was slow, but eventually it reached every part of the subcontinent and passed beyond it to adjacent countries : Sri Lanka, Burma, Tibet, Central Asia.

From Gandhara on the North-west it spread farther afield, going as far as Mongolia, Siberia, Korea, China, Japan, Indo-China, Malaya, Indonesia, Thailand. Religious faith was accompanied by culture. Culture drew no line between Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Much labelled Brahmanical was contained in it. Indian or 'Hindu' culture thus spread all over the Far East. Those who were not Buddhists or dominated by the mentality of Aryavarta, freely crossed and re-crossed the seas. Saiva and Vaishnava forms of worship were introduced into Indonesia and Indo-China. Sanskrit had a wide vogue among the learned. An Indonesian professor whom I met at Santiniketan recited to me a Sanskrit chhanda which he said was still used in his country although it had vanished from India. His name was Dr. Virya Supartha, which means Vir Arjuna. The prefix 'su' is very common in Indonesia and it means exactly what it means to us, something good and beautiful. The names Suharta and Sukarna are examples. When Dr. Supartha returned to Indonesia he wrote to me announcing the birth of his first child, a son. The name he had chosen for the baby boy was Aryavartaputra Jayavishnuvardhana. An amazing name for a Muslim child. Dr. Supartha was a Muslim. He explained that, as the child had been conceived in India, he was a son of Aryavarta, so to speak. The rest he did not explain. In Indonesia those who change their religion apparently do not need to change their culture along with it. The tendency is to retain it. It is, after all, a valuable part of a rich and diversified heritage. I met a student from Bali also at Santiniketan. He was a Hindu and gave us an exquisite dance performance one evening. Dr. Ida Bagus Mantra is now the Director of Archaeology in Indonesia. Not long ago an international Ramayana festival was held in Bali under his auspices.

Supartha and Mantra belong to the same race. Neither of them is the descendent of an Indian settler. Their people received religious beliefs from India two thousand years ago and a common culture with them. The common culture is still current everywhere in Indonesia, although Buddhism has gone out of fashion and Hinduism survives only in Bali. I have used the word 'Hinduism' here in the conventional present-day sense. It is not my intention to imply that Buddhists are not Hindus in the sense of being Indian. It is better, how-

ever, to put them in a separate category because so many of them are not Indians. The Balinese Hindus are not Indians either. They are in no sense Indian. This is an anomaly which is bound to grow as more and more people embrace Hinduism in the West.

Nobody knows exactly how a parting of the ways took place between Buddhists and Hindus of the Vedic persuasion. It is clear that Buddhists lost out to the Hindus of Aryavarta. They gradually fell back into areas on its periphery and lost ground there also. They vanished from the South altogether. The North-west and the North-east were strongholds they held to the last. Brahmanical Hinduism forced them out from both these places as well. Not long after they succumbed to conversion by Muslim invaders or traders and adopted the Islamic creed. The story was repeated in Central Asia, Malaya and Indonesia. Buddhism held its ground in the home territory of the Moguls, in Mongolia, Tibet, Burma, Thailand, Indo-China and Sri Lanka. Also in Japan, Korea and China.

Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism are represented almost equally in Asia as a whole, both in numbers and area. In India itself, by a strange quirk of fate, a large area has been set aside for the Muslims, now divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh. In both Muslims have taken the place of Buddhists in the outer circles, leaving the traditional heartland of Aryavarta to the Hindus along with the South and the circles connecting them. These four zones mainly constitute India today. Hind or Hindustan is an equally appropriate name. Never in history has India been smaller. The India of the British Raj was much larger. Largest of all was the India of the ancients. Culturally, not politically, it extended from Central Asia to Bali. The India of the British, French and Dutch Companies extended to the Malaya Archipelago and gave its name to the Indian Ocean. No other ocean has been named after a country or a continent. It is a unique honour. A cultural entity was, in this case, also a commercial entity. For a thousand years or more it was also a religious entity. Buddhism was in its fold, enjoying perfect equality with Hinduism.

The India of the ancients has contracted. Its borders are now those of 1947. It has lost the Indus valley from which

it took its name. The Hindus have lost the place which gave them their designation also. There is no Sind in India any more. This double loss would have been tripled or quadrupled if the people of India had agreed to call the country Hindustan, accepting the change in name suggested by both militant Muslims and Hindus at the time of partition. India's character would have been changed and the entire course of her History falsified. India has evolved as a composite entity that has received and absorbed people of many races, many cultures, many creeds down the ages. No invader has been rejected, no enemy exterminated. Place has been found for all. Enemies have been turned into friends. Those who came to exploit, to loot and kill remained to pray. The Buddhists have set their cosmic wheel in the centre of India's flag and if the lion capital on the Emperor Asoka's iron pillar is India's seal, British lions still rise securely over the gates of the Governor's mansion in Calcutta.

Nothing in recorded history tells us what exactly happened between 1500 B.C. and 600 B.C. It is fairly obvious, however, that the spread of Aryan power was checked during this time even though the influence of Aryan culture continued to grow, radiating far and wide. Ultimately a fusion took place between Aryan, Pre-Aryan and Non-Aryan. It was an intensely practical fusion though it may not have been a comprehensive one. All three, the Pre-Aryan, Aryan and Non-Aryan can, in retrospect, be safely described as Hindu. The word Hindu in this context included Buddhists and Jainas as well as other heterodox sects, believers and non-believers. By 600 B.C. the Indian or Hindu had emerged from an Aryanised pre-Aryan culture. He had also emerged from the pre-Aryanised Aryan, although this was a process that was to take another six hundred years to reach completion. Meanwhile the Greeks and Sakas arrived. Some of them became Hinduised, probably through the influence of Vaishnavism and Saivism as well as Buddhism, and were absorbed into the *varnas* as warriors, priests, traders or peasants. The Kushanas and the Hunas came later and were likewise assimilated.

For the Vedic, Jaina and Buddhist religions the most glorious period in Hindu history came between 600 B.C. and 600 A.D. India was the centre of a great and expanding

sphere of cultural and religious dominion that spread from the mainland overseas, mostly in an Eastern direction. On the West Persia and, after Persia, Greece predominated. The wheel of fortune was to sweep the Arabs to the top. A great prophet appeared whose influence put them in the vanguard of the age he inaugurated. Their power radiated from the Middle East to North Africa and the Southern shores of Europe. They strode across three continents and as many seas, commanding the Mediterranean. The people accepted Islam, possibly under duress. With the rise of this strong powerful religion, of which Mohammed was the Prophet, India's own contacts with the islands linked to her on the East also gradually became tenuous. Sea travel was perilous. As India's hold over them weakened these islands turned their faces towards Arabia and Islam. The Brahmans had always looked down on them anyway and they had been accorded the treatment reserved for 'mlechchhas', outsiders and defiled people. The Buddhists were on their way out too and lacked the strength required to protect them. Little by little India forgot her islands.

The Buddhists broke with the followers of the Vedic religion. Decadence set in. Sanskrit literature lost touch with reality. Bhakti took precedence over knowledge. The social system became more and more rigid and inflexible. The society of the time was a closed society with a closed mind. The period from A.D. 600 to 1200 was one of decline. But India showed no signs of slackening vitality in matters of the spirit. The Vaishnavas, Saivas and Saktas flourished. It was a halcyon time for all who trusted in *bhakti* or blind devotion.

When the Arabs penetrated the outer North-western circle and established their rule over the historic Indus valley the reaction was not strong. In the absence of a paramount power the people had been long exposed to periodic invasions and internal dissension. The Arabs settled near the mouth of the Indus river, and made it the base of their further incursions. Sultan Mahmud's destruction of the beautiful and holy temple of Somnath deeply outraged Hindu feelings but his annexation of the Punjab was only a repetition of history. The people of India were slow to realise that the power of the new conquerers derived from their new faith and that Islam had made of its

followers a master race. Little did they know conversion, if necessary by the sword, was to go hand in hand with conquest. Gandhara became the Eastern outpost of the Islamic world. For centuries this North-western territory had been Hindu and Buddhist. The people accepted Islam and another link was added to a chain that bound Spain to Sind and the Punjab.

India, a part of the ancient Aryan world, extending from Ireland to Aryavarta, had become the mainland of the Hindu world also. It stretched from Gandhara to Java. This ascendancy was not to last. Arab sea power cut her off more and more effectively from the green islands that had been her glory. India became doubly isolated. Whatever links she might have had with Europe were gone and gone also were the Eastern lands with which she had such a great affinity. The glory of her past was never to be restored. It became legendary, the pride of pandits who found consolation for their reduced circumstances in dreams of a golden antiquity.

A new period of cosmopolitan greatness could not begin until contact with the world at large was restored some centuries later. Europe was passing through a similar period of curtailment. It was a time for withdrawal and self-appraisal. The Europeans were the first to rally. With revived initiative they rediscovered India, discovering America into the bargain. The Portuguese arrived about the same time as the Moguls. Meanwhile the Turks had moved down from the North-west and established themselves in the heartland of Aryavarta. Their sway extended from the North-west to the North-east of India, excluding Assam. They also ruled much of Central and Western India. Even the South was not spared. But the Turks, in accordance with historical Indian precedents, soon split up into small groups and formed rival sultanates. The Moguls found it fairly easy to subdue them. With the exception of the extreme South and the very far East the whole of India fell to the Moguls and they succeeded in making it a unified whole. Akbar was Asoka's worthy successor. No other ruler had approached him in stature. In trying to go farther Aurangzeb fared worse. His successors lost the fabulous empire with exemplary speed.

Arabs, Turks and Mongols appeared on the European horizon also. There too they penetrated into the interior. The



Turks made a determined effort to reach Vienna, the heart of the Europe of that time. They failed but they kept their hold on Greece and Greece was the fountainhead of Western civilisation. By so doing they set in motion, perhaps inadvertently, the mighty forces that were destined to transform Europe from a medieval continent into a modern one, forces which crystallised in the Renaissance. The Turks were unable to unite Europe under the Crescent. They lost all but a small tract of land which included of course the splendid city of Constantinople, now called Istanbul. During the twelve centuries Islam had the opportunity to convert Europeans to its creed it had very little success.

In India it was a different story. The holy men of Islam were welcomed and found a permanent place in the religious and spiritual life of the people even while Arabs, Turks and Moguls came and went, seizing power and passing on, mounting thrones and toppling them as they vanished. Unlettered Hindus embraced Islam in millions. The end product of this process was the creation of Pakistan, a 'holy' land.

The period between 1200 and 1800 A.D. was ruled over by the Turkish and Mogul sword. The official language was Persian, the culture of the ruling classes took on a Middle Eastern character. It was a time of fundamental conflict between two cultures, two religions, two races. One was Islamic, the other Hindu or Indian. One stretched westwards as far as Spain, the other eastwards as far as Japan.

A conflict of such magnitude and duration could not be resolved without each party getting to know the other well and the better acquainted they became the more they realised the advantages of a non-military solution to their problems of adjustment. The solution that was ultimately reached turned out to be a characteristically Indian one. The Hindus were more or less agreed that at the moment there was nobody in their fold who could rule the entire country and defend it at the same time. If the Mlechchhas and Yavanas could perform this essential service and wanted to do so they were welcome to do it on one condition; no distinction between Muslims and Hindus should be made in matters concerned with administration. The response from the Muslim side was favourable. Many Muslim kings and governors or highly placed officials showed an exem-

plary impartiality and a strong regard for justice in carrying out their duties. Muslim fanatics were chagrined but held in check. Babar laid down the policy that was later followed by Akbar to the entire satisfaction of the Hindus. The Mogul empire would have lasted much longer than it did if Aurangzeb had not reversed this policy. The type of rule the Hindus had accepted so willingly was Indian rather than Islamic in character. Indian interests took precedence over Islamic interests. The rulers were Indians first and Muslims second. Akbar warmly assented. Aurangzeb dissented. He was filled by a passionate Islamic zeal. His fanaticism broke loose from the restraints imposed upon it by his illustrious predecessors. All other problems of adjustment and accommodation between Hindus and Muslims found satisfactory solution in course of time but not this one. It is still with us today. Pakistanis refused to be Indians and act like Indians, although doing so did not and does not mean becoming a Hindu by religion. Conversion has never been even suggested. Muslims, like all Indians, are free to have their own culture, their own religious practices, their own personal law, their own social system.

The British, when they assumed power, guaranteed there would be no discrimination between Muslim and non-Muslim, Christian and non-Christian, Hindu and non-Hindu. To that extent the British Raj was a great improvement. Initially there was no conflict but, in course of time, it became more and more apparent that discrimination was being made between brown and white, between European and Indian. During the Mogul regime it was always possible for a Hindu to escape caste and other forms of discrimination endemic to the Hindu social system by simple conversion. He could become a Muslim. Many did. An Indian could not turn himself into a European, however, even after receiving the best education Europe had to offer. He could not make himself white. The question inevitably arose : In whose interest was India to be governed, India's or England's? Whose interests were to have precedence ? It was a question with ramifications beyond India's borders. England was the heartland of the British empire, the central link in a far-flung sphere of dominion. India was the heartland of another and different sphere of cultural suzerainty, older and even more far-reaching, held together by spiritual

and cultural and historical affinities. The British empire was held together by the British army. A variety of issues complicated the conflict further. None of them was insoluble in itself. But the fundamental question remained : Whose interests were to be paramount, India's or England's ?

The British did not come to India overland as Alexander the Great had done. They preferred the sea route. The ships of the East India company sailed up and down India's coasts and as far as China. The China trade was almost as important as the Indian. The British stopped short of ruling China, however, and contented themselves with the control of its gateways to the sea. This was their original intention in India also. It was providence that set them on the throne of this ancient land. They brought it a greater degree of unity and peace than it had ever known. Their greatest contribution was the introduction of the Modern Age to India. India would not have been able to pull herself out of the medieval period to the extent she has without contact with the British. The Moguls were incapable of modernizing India. The Sepoy Mutiny failed because no one seriously believed the Mogul Emperor could or would meet the challenge of the times if he was restored to the throne. The British ruled India for less than two centuries but in that short span of time India passed through development equivalent to four centuries of slow evolution in the Western world. Two thousand years earlier India had been greatly enriched by her contact with Greece. She was enriched even more by her contact with England and, to a lesser extent, France, the two most progressive nations in the modern world at that time. They were also the most liberal and democratic. Thanks to them India, too, had a renaissance; she was born into fresh life and vigour.

A renaissance of the kind that took place would have been difficult to bring about if the ground for it had not been to some extent prepared by India's experience of Persian and Islamic culture. The minds of the people had been stirred enough to crack the shell of an ancient and inflexible tradition. Between 1200 and 1800 A.D. a momentous animation among the people began to manifest itself all over India. This is the period described by historians as the Muslim era. I am not in favour of dividing history into compartments on a religious-

basis. To me a 'Hindu' period or a 'Muslim' period are designations devoid of meaning. It would make more sense to speak of Rajput, Turkish, Mogul or British periods. But this is also meaningless for a country is always greater than its rulers. Multitudes of men are far more real than a handful of privileged persons in exalted positions. To my way of thinking the best way to write history is to divide it simply into the Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods. In India the Ancient period had three sub-headings : the Early Ancient or Pre-Aryan, the Middle Ancient or Aryan in the North and the Dravidian in the South and the Late Ancient or Unified Hindu period. Each sub-division lasted more or less a thousand years. India also had an Early Medieval period and a Late Medieval period, each of about six hundred years' duration. During the Early Medieval period the rulers were mostly Hindus. During the Late Medieval period they were chiefly Muslims who had settled in the country and become Indians, although they did not change their faith. This brings us to the Modern Period inaugurated by the British rulers.

The Late Ancient Period dates from 600 B.C. to 600 A.D. By that time India had already ceased to be the pure land of the Aryans. It was Hindu, every part of it, the word 'Hindu' meaning, in this context, mixed Aryan and pre-Aryan. It had no religious connotation. As we have seen the term was derived from 'Indus' or 'Sindhu', both geographical designations. A Buddhist was as much a Hindu as a Vedantist. Throughout the Ancient period the culture of India was a mixed culture, an amalgam of Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanical. Those who abided by the authority of the Vedas and performed Vedic sacrifices according to Vedic ritual were as much a part of it as those who worshipped the Mother Goddess or Siva or Vishnu. Other cults, like the Tantra, were esoteric and secret but all of them were Hindu, although not all of them were Aryan. The Aryan world had disintegrated by that time. Variation and diversification had been introduced into it by growing familiarity with Pre-Aryan culture and speech and intermarriage, resulting in a Hindu world. This world had internal and external contacts over wide areas of land and sea. It was essentially an Indian world, a world within which many religions found shelter. The Aryan idea was incompatible.

with the Hindu idea, being based on either language or race or both. The Hindu idea was based upon geography in the first instance and a social system in the second, a system that had been in the process of evolution before the Aryans came.

Shall I then begin to speak of Hindu culture somewhere around 600 B.C. and conclude in A.D. 600 ? No. The development of Hindu culture was an uninterrupted continuum and proceeded steadily throughout the Early Medieval period also, until it was confronted with Islam. Islam cannot be defined in terms of country or nation, territory or race. The only connotation it has is religious, because it has to do primarily with religion. The question that arose was whether an Indian Muslim was an Indian as well as a Muslim and, if so, whether his identity as an Indian took precedence over his identity as a Muslim. When a conflict arose between these two identities which would be accorded precedence ? The contention to which this inevitably gave rise was the result of a basic lack of affinity. It was a conflict between Islam and India, not between Islam and a religion called Hinduism for there was no such religion. By 'Hinduism' Muslims understood all the religions practised in India before the coming of the Muslims. The Indian people heard themselves called Hindus for the first time in their long history. It was a description entirely new to them although not unknown outside the country. On the other hand, the alternative term, Aryan, had long been obsolete and was no longer applicable even to the upper castes. Ninety per cent of the population was plainly non-Aryan, both in speech and blood. The new appellation, Hindu, was therefore taken up even in regions far away from the Indus valley, Sind or the Punjab.

Holy men of both creeds set about building bridges between their respective creeds. There were many saints and mystics. The aristocrats and intellectuals blended their cultures. An Indo-Iranian style of living and mode of thought based on ancient Aryan affinities evolved. This might have developed into a more general Hindustani culture with time but the Europeans arrived, bringing a highly developed civilisation of their own. The process of fusion between the Indian and Iranian civilisations was abruptly interrupted. The Europeans also brought their own religion with them, Christianity. Culture in general became more comprehensive in order to accommodate the new

additions to the ways of the country. Another ancient affinity was discovered that facilitated the adjustments that had become necessary : the common stock of Sanskrit, Greek and Latin. India rapidly passed through a renaissance and a reformation. The Hindus were the most affected. Social customs and religious practices were modified. Some began to dream of a revival. The Muslims also wanted a revival but one without the benefit of either a renaissance or a reformation.

India's cultural heritage, a heritage of five thousand rich and eventful years, has found a place for the legacies of the Arabs, Turks and the Moguls. These are collectively described as the Muslim rulers of the Late Medieval period. There would have been no Taj Mahal but for them, no Hindustani music, no Urdu literature and Bengali literature in its infancy would have lacked the patronage that assisted its growth into a robust maturity. This heritage has also found room for the legacy of the British rulers and the contributions of the Christian missionaries. A religion can be, and often is, exclusive. Culture cannot be. Culture is inclusive. It is independent of creed as well as of ideology. This does not mean that religion has nothing to do with it. No account of any great culture can be adequate without bringing in religion. But if a dominant role is assigned to religion it will try to exclude many of the other components regardless of whatever importance they may have. If culture were not inclusive could the ancient Greeks and Romans have had anything in common or modern Russia and America ?

In these lectures I shall not use the term 'Hindu' in an exclusive sense before 1200 A.D. After that date a concession must be made to Indian Muslim feelings in the matter. Indian Muslims do not like to be described as Hindus in any sense of the word. I can say Hindustani which is less offensive and does not give umbrage to Hindus either. It is, however, less inclusive than 'Indo-English' or 'Modern Indian'. How can I overlook Sri Aurobindo's poem, *Savitri* ?

Hindu culture is not the culture of a religious community called Hindu, nor that of a race called Aryan but that of a country called India or Hind. It has permanently enriched the cultures of related countries like Indonesia and Indo-China. In its turn it has received valuable contributions from the cultures of the Middle East and Modern West by historical

association. It is a dynamic culture, not a static one, growing broader and deeper with the passing of centuries, even as the Ganga broadens and deepens as it approaches the sea. Like this great river it has its dry seasons and flood seasons when its waters are low and high. It has on occasion abandoned one river-bed for another, changing its course, but it has never stopped flowing in an unbroken continuity, passing through the Aryan belt of influence, a belt that stretched from Ireland in the West to the Northern part of India, following along the Islamic chain that stretched from Spain to Indonesia, and running through the English sphere of influence that extended from the British isles to Japan. It has, on its part, become the source of a cultural flood inundating a multitude of cultures, Tibetan to Indonesian.

If we begin with the Indus valley excavations India's culture has been vitally alive for over four or five thousand years. There has been no dead break. Only the Chinese can claim anything approaching this historical record. Renewal has been the key to the survival of both these ancient civilisations.

Renewal has gone hand in hand with change and an ability to domesticate intruding forces as new additions to the general household. This indicates a remarkable flexibility in a land famed for its rigidity. Alien speech and culture and modes of thought as well as fresh religious experience have never been rejected outright. On the contrary. Those who have brought these things to India's shores have been welcomed and the infusion of new blood has added to the vital resources of the people. Invasions have served the same purpose as the floods which built the alluvial plains. Even spells of foreign rule have had a stimulating and rejuvenating effect. Left to itself India may well have lapsed into a somnolent and contented stagnation. Sterility would have followed. Indians traded, conquered and colonised, learned and taught what they learned. With them, over land and sea, went their ways of thinking and living. Moving up along the old Silk Road they carried their culture even into China, Korea and Japan where it has had a lasting effect. A people who have freedom of movement and freedom to speak of what they learn bring a freshness to their country that adds strength to its spirit. There was a time, however, when travel abroad was forbidden and

crossing the sea considered sinful. The spirit of learning languished, eagerness and curiosity about the unfamiliar waned.

Nowhere in the long course of India's history does one run across revolution from below. We have not produced any revolutionaries in the French or Russian sense of the word. Reformers and reformists have likewise been drawn from the elite : instead of complacently sitting back and indulging in self-praise while we gaze with admiration upon what we regard as our national genius we should perhaps take a lesson from another part of the world once more. The Chinese are our closest neighbours. Their problems have been in many ways similar to ours. They too have been remarkably complacent in the recent past. A revolution from below changed all that, contrary to all expectations, and ancient things the people have traditionally lived by are being rooted out. Even the teachings of Confucius are no longer considered relevant. The foundations of the time-honoured philosophy on which the social structure of the country has rested since 600 B. C. are being questioned and rejected. Economic exploitation is only one of the targets of the revolution that is in progress. Nothing can survive a revolution of such magnitude. The only way to avoid it is by not allowing any part of the way of life or thought, no matter how old, to become antiquated. What is useless and irrelevant to present needs can not be preserved outside a museum.

That there is and always has been a gap between the elite and the common people in India cannot be denied. The elite have had their classical literature, the common people their folk tales and songs. The gap is at its widest perhaps between the highly sophisticated classical philosophies and the superstitions which shape so large a part of village life. Since the time of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata this cleavage has been wide open, growing wider from day to day. The contributions to India's culture of her unlettered millions have not been taken into account whereas the roles of the tallest figures among the elite are magnified, thereby thrusting them into an isolation and prominence that is perilous in its conspicuousness. Where are the statues of the British stalwarts who imagined they had made a lasting impression upon India ? May the statues of the Indian stalwarts belonging to the elite not meet the same fate ?



In 1970 we saw the dress rehearsal of a revolution of this kind. Cultural monuments suffered at the hands of violence and lives were taken. The problem that demands an urgent solution is how to reconcile the new with the old to the advantage of both. The gap must be closed. Exploitation has to end. One way of doing it is to make the rich and varied legacy of a hundred generations accessible to the common people, entrust it to their hands. This calls for the preservation and modification of cultural institutions rather than their destruction. We shall all be the poorer if they are demolished. Each generation is expected to add to the common heritage of mankind in general and, in India, to the Indian heritage in particular. The elite of the country are the best qualified to do this and they have carried the burden of it down the ages. Their task at the moment is, without lowering standards, to create and contribute something that, by its appropriateness, will be acceptable to and treasured by the unlettered common people, closing the dangerous cultural breach imperceptibly and finally. It cannot be filled with garbage like a pit on vacant land. Coarse and vulgar entertainment downgrades. That is not what is wanted. Only upgrading can provide a satisfactory and invigorating solution. It is an insult to our people to offer them cheap and vulgar cultural fare. They have known better and are capable of recognising the highest and best art if and when it is set before them. Have they not accepted and treasured the Ramayana and Mahabharata? Only the best is good enough for them. The common people do not accept anything and everything passively. Given access to the cultural and material equipment they must have in order to give expression to their creative impulses, they will make things of beauty and significance themselves. We may have a Gorky. This is one of the problems that urgently demands attention.

We are living in an age of far-reaching change. The minds of men everywhere are in a ferment. Empires have become obsolete; few are left on the face of the earth. Hierarchical social orders are toppling. In the circumstances a fresh look at India's traditional and modern cultural life has more than academic interest. Without a clear picture of our past successes and failures we cannot plan the kind of future that will carry the country through this period of turmoil into a time of peace

and general prosperity, a time that will create new monuments to the enduring creative power of India no less, and hopefully more, beautiful than the relics of the past that so enchant us. Our history has been a chiaroscuro of trial and error, wisdom and folly, darkness and light, rise and fall. Thirty years are as nothing in a tale of three thousand. We need not be unduly depressed nor uncritically optimistic. To arrive at a correct assessment of our situation we must strike a correct balance. Let me sum up my own position as follows : I am a Hindu by birth attracted to many features in the Islamic and Christian faiths which seem sympathetic to my way of feeling and thinking. They are as much a part of my personality as my Hindu traditions. I am an Indian with an empathy for European culture and thought. I am a member of the elite and also in many ways a man of the people. I believe in India's Renaissance and have taken part in it and, at the same time, retained my faith in the eternal verities. Ideologically I am a liberal democrat, but also a visionary of the Tolstoyan and Gandhian persuasion, a non-violent anarchist. My personal problem is how to reconcile myself to myself and it is still unsolved, even at the age of three score and twelve. No one is more unqualified to deal with India's self-contradictoriness. How to ease one of the most ancient civilisations of the world into a modern era and guide it safely to the front rank without sacrificing its soul ? By forcing the pace we may be jeopardising the soul, may we not ? The country, rejuvenated, must keep what is worth keeping, let go of what is worth losing, and add to its treasure what is worth gaining.

In a long epic struggle, unprecedented in history for its employment of harmless and gentle humanitarian methods that dispensed with violence, India freed itself from foreign rule and brought to an end a humiliating period of subjugation. It has not freed itself from the clutches of enslaving superstition, untouchability, caste servility. The civilisation of Greece and Rome were based on slavery. So was the ancient Indian. Menial work was assigned to an under-privileged or unprivileged class of people regarded as belonging to a separate category of human beings. They are thought to be born to their condition and made to feel the only remedy is to be born again in improved circumstances. Nothing short of a new

philosophy of life can liberate this class from their servile mentality and their overlords from their oppressive habits. The violence implicit in Marxism does not appeal to me as an Indian. I dread it. Gandhian means should be just as efficacious and more enduring in their beneficial effects. A Gandhian solution is not easy to evolve. The Mahatma himself used many techniques, choosing the tactics that matched the issue he had in hand at the moment. We are only halfway to our goal. We are also only halfway to the liberation of women after half a century of struggle. Women have been placed in two categories by all ancient civilisations, those who serve in the household and those who entertain in houses of pleasure. The latter were cultured, taught to sing and dance. Some of them acquired skill in the art of literature also. They enjoyed an enviable status. In India some were consecrated to temples, ostensibly given wholly to the service of the presiding deity. Priests often acted on behalf of these deities and local nobles were also obliged. In Sanskrit literature these women have been extolled as heavenly nymphs and their praises sung. They began to lose their privileged position in the medieval period and degenerated into common prostitutes in the Modern. For writers today they are a forbidden subject. Even the most extreme revolutionaries do not concern themselves with the slave trade in women. Gandhians have no answer to this question except continence for all men and women. It is easier for an untouchable to rise in India's public life today than for one of these unfortunate women to find acceptance.

For women occupied with household chores it is difficult to find the leisure required for the acquisition of any culture of high standard. The aristocrats are a dying class. They lost their patronage long ago. They no longer have any courts to which singers and poets and dancers can be attached. In a democratic world patronage has passed into the hands of a public whose taste for all forms of art except the most traditional is undeveloped for lack of opportunity to see and hear the best. Will socialism remedy this state of affairs?

Men are traditionally classified into two categories also, as householders or family men, and ascetics. This attitude is so deeply rooted it is doubtful whether socialism or anything else can make a difference. The celibate single man can be

conscripted for work or for war more easily than a man with a family. That is convenient for the state. On the other hand a man who has taken holy orders commands veneration even in a prison. He is ideally equipped to be a rebel but he is usually too other-worldly to become one. India has produced many saints but no rebels among her monks. Gandhi was both, possibly under Christian influence.

Although India has been the classic land of asceticism with Jains, Buddhist and Hindus vying with each other in their effort to subdue the fleshly appetites this has not led to the formation of a Church as in Europe. Consequently there has never been any conflict between the Church and the State, no official inquisition or witch-hunting. The Buddhist Sangha was as highly organised as the Christian Church but no temporal or ecclesiastical power was concentrated in its hands. Islam had no Church. India lacks historical experience of Church-State rivalry. On the other hand no spiritual authority in India has been able, like the Pope, to impose any restraint on a king or emperor. The nobility in India has been freer from moral or religious control than the nobility of Europe. And the Sangha in India has not patronised the arts. Apart from Buddhist monuments and a few cave paintings it has left nothing to compare with the great European cathedrals. In India kings and nobles have been the only patrons of the arts worth the name. One of the reasons for this was that women have an important role to play in art and ascetics were not interested in them except as objects of lust to be shunned. The royal court was the cultural centre in India, not the temple or the monastery, throughout the Ancient and Medieval periods. This tradition lingered in the princely states as long as these existed.

The departure of the princes has created a void. For three thousand years artists looked to them for the support all artists require to carry on their work. Can a cold, impersonal state fill this vacuum? It is for the common people to take upon themselves the role of princes and kings. Artists are turning more and more to the public for the sanctions without which artistic creation is not possible. Under the British patronage was in private hands largely and artists depended upon the *nouveau riche* class of merchants, officials and land-owners. After two hundred years of a certain amount

of prosperity this class has gone into decline. With the coming of socialism it will vanish altogether.

Talent in India is certain to find an opening which will enable it to create a future for itself, whatever the social or political set-up may be, however sordid and vulgar the debased taste of the public. There is much talent among the common people that, after centuries of neglect, can profitably be allowed to develop freely. The gap between folk culture and elite culture can be closed as it has been closed in Europe. Folk culture need not remain inferior or be limited to a cultural underworld. The elite culture of the upper classes need not remain pale, exquisite and devitalised. A culture is required in which all sections of the populace participate, contributing freely and creatively to the integration of the country as a whole. It will have a taste and flavour entirely new in our history. Outstanding artists may be few but drops combine to make lakes, rivers and oceans. A flowering will inevitably follow, such a flowering of talent as we have never known. The art and artists that will result from it will be of a different kind and temper, stronger and more beautiful.

The people of India have lived according to religious precepts from the time of the Vedas. The hold of religion over the minds and hearts of the average Indian only began to slacken during the last hundred years of British rule. Europe passed through a parallel historical development which began with the introduction of Christianity. Greece and Rome enjoyed many centuries of freedom of belief, undominated by creed. The memory of this freedom contributed to the Renaissance which brought about a breakthrough in man's thinking and feeling. The crippling shackles of orthodoxy were cast aside. This freedom has grown stronger with the years. Men no longer have to take their opinions readymade, or conduct themselves according to blind custom.

We can now, with free and unfettered minds, consider what relation our future will bear to our past. European culture, both during the Ancient and Medieval periods, reflects a freedom from subordination to religion which can be paralleled in India only during the last hundred years. And we owe this to the presence of Europeans. Will religion govern life or life govern religion in the future we are preparing for ourselves?

Or will both life and culture be free from the domination of any religion ? Freedom does not mean negation. Let there be religion and let there be culture. They can and should exist side by side, in mutual respect. Neither should subordinate the other.

The independence of India from the West is political. Cultural independence should not be either identified or confused with it. Cultural independence means also the independence of the modern Indian mind from enslavement to Medieval and Ancient ideas in India itself. This is an achievement of no less importance and perhaps greater magnitude. It does not imply the denial or destruction of our cultural heritage. Far from it. It is too rich, too diverse, too unique to throw away. Our contribution to it in the Modern Age has so far been meagre by comparison. But we can never make any contribution to it at all if we constantly and conscientiously kowtow to it. Nothing can be more incompatible with the Renaissance spirit than blind servility and self-denigration. Revivalism is often confused with renaissance in India. Without fresh ideas, fresh thinking, fresh experiment and exploration of latent possibilities and fresh enterprise we shall merely re-live the past. Nothing admirable will result, neither a new Ramayana nor a new Mahabharata, neither a new Ajanta nor a new Taj Mahal. Without fresh and invigorating inspiration nothing comparable can be accomplished. This will come only when we are ready for it.

In Modern Europe the contrast between the classical and Christian traditions is profound. The Renaissance did not close the gap and no sign of a synthesis capable of closing it has yet appeared. A similar contrast exists in India between the traditional Hindu supernaturalism and Modern Humanism, a contrast that is sharpening and deepening with the passage of time. Science is included under the heading of Modern Humanism and so is modern philosophy and aesthetics. When the thinkers of the nineteenth century were confronted with this Humanism they sought refuge in constructing a synthesis between East and West. They assumed the disparity was the result of a polarisation between Matter and Spirit. The West was materialistic, The East Spiritual. It was an ill-founded assumption as we all recognise today. We are addicted to the

idea of synthesis and believe fondly in the power of synthesis to solve all conflicts satisfactorily. To forge a suitable synthesis is not easy. Japan is hopelessly split between its traditional Shinto-Buddhist-Chinese past and the modern Western Humanist present. No synthesis is in sight. Our predicament is similar. It is good to know we are not the only ones facing a problem of this kind.

Old civilisations cannot exist in a new world except as museum pieces, unless they bring themselves into line in a manner that enables them to function without sacrificing any of their glory. They must remain true to their essence which is indefinable and at the same time infuse themselves with a fresh and vigorous vital spirit and live anew. All these questions came up in the nineteenth century. They have been discussed and various solutions proposed. These solutions have lost their relevance today. The whole subject has to be re-opened if satisfactory answers are ever to be found.

A Russian professor whom I happened to meet in London was engaged in writing a history of Mongolia. He told me that during the reign of the first three Mogul Emperors of India the history of our sub-continent had been a part of Mongolia's history because the Mongols take great pride in these monarchs. If the logic of such an argument is found acceptable the earlier Sultans of Delhi may also have made a place for India in the history of the Turks, Pathans or Afghans. The Hunas, Kushanas, Sakas and Indo-Greeks may likewise have put us into their histories. If this line of argument is pushed further back in time the history of the Vedic Aryans was no less a part of the history of the Aryan homeland wherever that may have been : Central Asia, Southern Russia or Central Europe. In order to better understand ourselves we should study the histories of all these peoples. We may possibly find traces of many of our customs and beliefs, laws and institutions. It may hurt our national pride to discover the origins of things long regarded as indigenous in places outside the country but it should be a consolation to note that Hindu-Buddhist culture has left its mark in these distant places as well. The Turks and Mongols and others were, in their turn, influenced by it long before they became Muslims and made their physical presence in India felt.

## THE ANCIENT PERIOD

India's Ancient Period is so extensive that I have divided it into three parts : the Early Ancient, from 2500 to 1500 B.C. a time during which the Pre-Aryans had the country to themselves ; the Middle Ancient, from 1500 to 600 B.C. during which the Aryans arrived and moved from the Indus valley to the Ganga basin where they consolidated their power, leaving the rest of India to the pre-Aryans, and the Late Ancient from 600 B.C. to 600 A.D. when all who lived in India or Hind gradually achieved a common identity as Hindus or Indians, irrespective of caste, creed, race, region, or speech, although Sanskrit was the language of the learned and the *varna* pattern of society was the most prevalent. These dates are approximate and provisional. Further archaeological excavation may push the first back in time but the date of the Aryan invasions is not likely to vary much as the entire bloc of countries that came under their influence was affected. They stretched across India, the Middle East and Europe.

The four oldest civilisations known to man are the Sumerian, the Egyptian, the Indus valley and the Chinese. There is ample evidence to show that the Indus valley civilisation was an urban civilisation of a sophisticated type. Cities like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa were not to be seen again for thousands of years. Nowhere in India has evidence been uncovered that Indo-Aryans had a superior civic sense, greater engineering skill or better ideas of justice. Both these cities



appear to have provided special housing for their workmen. Market gardens on the outskirts of the cities and the surrounding villages catered to the needs of the populace. And there is reason to believe commercial relations with neighbouring countries on the West were well developed. More and more cities and settlements of this period are in the process of being investigated. The area covered now includes the Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Who knows how far it will ultimately extend? Future generations may grow up with the knowledge that this submerged civilisation stretched much further to the southeast and east. It is an almost impossible task to detect and establish continuity between a civilisation that vanished from the record for thousands of years and a civilisation that documented itself in the Vedas and Upanishads as well as in other ways. The people who participated in the earlier civilisation continued to exist certainly regardless of the manner in which their cities and artifacts were destroyed. These people made their contribution to the new order even as they served it, as craftsmen, farmers, and in other humble but essential capacities.

The Aryans were not fond of cities and palaces. They preferred open spaces, plains where even villages were not crowded, woodlands on the banks of rivers. They appear to have felt much at home in forests. The Aryan way of life had to change a good deal before their living conditions could become what they are described as being in the Mahabharata. The stark simplicity of a nomadic people was gradually superseded by richer and more elaborate ways. The Mahabharata probably existed many centuries before it was written down, being recited and sung by bards until it attained an epic perfection and directness comparable to that of the Odyssey. It has been a living treasure much longer. It was not possible to put it into writing until the language itself and the system of writing had developed sufficiently to be adequate. By that time the Mahabharata had attained a bulk that kept generations of scribes busy putting the stories and legends down on paper. These scribes had regional and individual idiosyncrasies. Additions, deletions, alterations were made, some inadvertently. Rome was not built in a day and neither was the Indo-Aryan civilisation of Aryavarta. When the Aryan-speaking peoples

entered India they did not come into an uninhabited desert land that was vacant and devoid of both inhabitants and culture. The people had a highly-developed civilisation of their own. In all probability the Aryans were short of women and workmen, and expected the local people to supply them. The ultimate result was a society that accommodated everybody at various levels and was common to all. The newcomers formed an upper crust, lording it over the older inhabitants. A stratification took place between higher and lower as has happened in similar historical circumstances all over the world, throughout history. Priests, warriors, merchants enjoyed a status second only to the king and the entire hierarchy rested upon a foundation of labourers who were both skilled and unskilled. Within the caste, however, there was autonomy.

Men of the upper *varnas* were legally permitted to marry women of lower *varnas*. Unions of this kind also took place outside the law. Blood and speech were both mixed. Pure Aryan blood and pure Aryan speech became more and more of a fiction. The process went so far no injunction against such unions was of any avail.

A remarkable feature of this period was the total absence of any feeling of inferiority or superiority associated with the colour of the skin. The heroes and heroines of the Mahabharata were blissfully unaware of any colour bar. They loved and married freely, without a thought for the complexion of their partner or their own beyond its beauty. The most beautiful woman in the Mahabharata, Draupadi, was dark-skinned. Dark also was the most handsome of the heroes, Krishna. Many of the rishis are also described as being of dark complexion. This suggests considerable racial admixture between the Aryans and the Dravidians.

The hero of the Ramayana, Rama, was also dark. The Ramayana was probably written down after the Mahabharata although it belongs to an earlier period.

Racial difference were considered important, however. The people of golden Lanka inhabited no mean kingdom but the Aryans regarded them as scarcely human, calling them Rakshasas or demons. The Vanaras of Kiskindhya were likewise denied human status. There are racial overtones in the conflict between the followers of Rama and the armies of Ravana. In the

conflict between the Kauravas and Pandavas there are none.

The conflict in the Ramayana also involved rivalry between North and South. Lanka, the pride of the South, was in no way inferior to the pride of the North, Ayodhya. Both were famous and beautiful cities. Lanka, like Troy, held the key to a sea route of great strategical importance. Wars ostensibly fought over women were often actually caused by the ambition to dominate maritime trade. Race and geography were both frequently involved. Colour seldom was, if ever.

The Jataka stories of the Buddhists are second only to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in influence and popularity. Like the two great epics they circulated in oral form long before being written down and they have exerted a comparable influence on Indian life both in depth and extent. The paintings and sculptures which have placed them before the people in a visual form are many and very beautiful. They do not, however, go back further than the legendary king, Brahmadata of Varanasi. Varanasi is the city that ranks next to Ayodhya in Indian literature. Courtesans played an important role in the cultural life of the period, particularly in the arts. Merchant princes controlled patronage. They provided the support without which neither the arts nor Jainism nor Buddhism could have flourished, playing the part of the Kshatriya princes who supported the Brahmanas. Brahmanical Hindus were eclectic, bracketing dharma, artha, kama and moksha together in that order. The merchant princes were esteemed as symbols of artha, the courtesans as symbols of kama. A Brahman Kshatriya Vaisya coalition gradually evolved within the context of Aryan ascendancy. They were the *dwijas* or twice-born. The toiling Sudras formed the foundation upon which this impressive social edifice was erected. What can be called the VBKV (Vedic, Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya) ascendancy enjoyed an importance in Aryavarta comparable to the WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) in the USA today.

Aryavarta was not exposed to foreign invasion as the outlying areas of the country were. It was the heart of the sub-continent. The Himalayas on the North and the Vindhya in the south sheltered it. Its Western flank was guarded by Delhi or the mythical Indraprastha and its Eastern flank by Rajgir. Hence

the importance of these cities. Expansion was slower in the East than on the South-west. Two great seaports came into existence on the Western coast, Bhrgukachchha and Sopara. On the Eastern coast there was only one, Tamralipti. Overland trade routes connected all three with the North, converging at points which became seats of power. Mathura, Sravasti, Vaisali, and Prayag became important. Like Varanasi, a city holy to both Hindus and Buddhists, these places took on a sacred character and people of all denominations held them in veneration.

Pataliputra, less holy, became the political capital. The Maurya and Gupta emperors both ruled from there. They exerted their authority over more distant areas through viceroys at Takshasila and Ujjayini and both these cities acquired importance also. Ujjayini is immortalised in Sanskrit literature. It was at Ujjayini that the most famous ruler in popular legend, Vikramaditya, lived and ruled. He was the patron of nine poets and scholars all of whom won great renown, adding lustre to his court. Kalidasa was the chief of them. Takshasila acquired international fame as a centre of learning and the capital of Gandhara. Gandhara was, of course, traditionally a part of India in spite of the fact that it was ruled by Greeks, Persians and Kushanas at different times for longer or shorter periods. These rulers themselves became Indianised in course of time. Many were Buddhists or Vaishnavas.

The concept of Bharatavarsha, a single, unified country, slowly emerged, growing stronger as the smaller Indian kingdoms bowed to the sovereignty of a paramount power one by one. It was a concept destined to replace Aryavarta, Dakshinapatha etc. As the idea of the indivisibility of the country took root the Vindhya range of mountains ceased to be regarded as an internal barrier. The far South remained outside. It did not form a part of the Asokan empire and remained outside all subsequent empires as well. Not until the British appeared on the scene did it unite wholly with the rest of the country. Sea power was required to subdue the people of Tamilnadu and Kerala. Sri Lanka, culturally the same as India, always kept a dignified distance and continued to do so even after she lost her independence and became known as Ceylon. The

city of Kanchi, in the South, was the equal of Varanasi, Prayag and Mathura in holiness. Dvaravati on the West coast and Puri on the Eastern, both places of great sanctity, extended the concept of a single sacred land. India as a whole became the holy land of all Hindus, although Aryavarta remained the heartland. The Aryans merged into a total identity called Hindu or Indian as that term has already been defined in these pages.

The country was divided longitudinally into principalities and kingdoms, republics, and the forest preserves of unconquered tribes. Society was divided horizontally into *jatis* and *varnas*. The word *jati* dervies from *janma*, birth. A man was born a blacksmith or carpenter and died as he was born. It was an arrangement that ruled out competition in the economic field. Indian society is still a non-competitive society. A caste division of labour takes care of the work of the community. Race came into the picture when an *adivasi* tribe was assimilated into the social structure. A special occupation was assigned to it. A Bagdi by caste meant a Bagdi by race. New castes were created as new occupations arose, although both caste and race were determined in the first instance by birth. Sometimes men were permitted to change their caste. A Hindu prince had certain prerogatives in these matters and often exercised them. Having been brought up in a small Hindu princely state I have had the opportunity to observe this process at work. The royal prerogative was a time-honoured one, not an modern innovation. A Hindu king was the head of society as well as of the state. This is not often fully realised by those whose experience is limited to the British Raj or Nawab rule.

Caste was not imposed from above. A co-ordinating authority regulated it in order to secure the provision of services of many kinds while protecting those who provided them from the vicissitudes of an uncertain livelihood and the threat of competition. No Hindu willingly parts with his caste before he is ready to renounce worldly life altogether and become a sadhu. A sadhu may join any religious organisation he chooses. The Buddhist religious fraternity is open to all without exception, high or low. Yet the Buddhist laity retained caste divisions as we know from Sri Lanka. The Jains also

follow caste customs. The Sikhs likewise. Caste affinities are retained even by Christian converts. And in the course of my career as an administrative officer of the Indian Government I have come across instances of caste practices even among Muslims.

The word *varna* is not a synonym for *jati* though it is often mistakenly used as if it were. Varna derives originally from *guna* which means a quality or virtue and implies merit and *karma* which means acts performed. A good warrior became a Kshatriya. He could seize power and make himself a king. Many kings were initially Brahmans or Sudras. Sometimes even Vaisyas and Sudras came to be ranked as Kshatriyas later, as a reward for their achievements. Warriors of alien origin not infrequently took Hindu names, sought initiation into the Vaishnava, Sakta or Saiva sects and likewise won recognition as Kshatriyas, marrying Kshatriya women. This was the case with Vaisyas also. Men who succeeded in amassing wealth eventually became accepted as Vaisyas, whatever their origin might have been. Power and wealth were considered *gunas* and those who had them meritorious. It was the same with *karma*, what a man did. These *gunas* were not associated with birth, except incidentally, although they tended to become hereditary as in all ancient social orders. The priests who accompanied or followed alien warriors were permitted to have Hindu names, carry out their priestly functions and worship Hindu gods and goddesses. If *varna* was, as claimed by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* a matter of *guna* and *karma* it was an open system, common to all India's cultures. A not dissimilar system existed in Ireland at one time and also in Greece. The position occupied by the Christian clergy in medieval Europe was roughly equivalent to that occupied by the Brahmans in India, although they, of course, were not allowed to marry.

The Vedic rishis believed in marriage. The married state was the second of the four *asramas* or stages into which life, for an Aryan, was divided. The priests themselves set the example. The four *asramas* matched the four *varnas*. No distinction of high and low was supposed to be made between them. Yet Brahmans and ascetics were accorded the highest esteem and were ranked above others. Total asceticism or *brahmacharya* was thought to be the highest spiritual condition to which a man could aspire.

No fall from it was permitted, even for the sake of preserving the race. Once a Brahman always a Brahman. Once a brahmacharin, always a brahmacharin. Lifelong celibacy won general acclaim and defects of character that may or may not also have been present were overlooked. It was the only way a Sudra could rise in public estimation and win a veneration equal to that of a Brahman despite his low birth.

There were many monastic orders among the Hindus which refused to admit any but Brahmans to their fold, however. True democracy began and ended in India with Buddhism. The phenomenal success of Islam among the Sudras can be directly linked with this fact. The social structure polarised around the concepts of purity and defilement. The Brahmans were considered pure and the Sudras tainted. Swami Vivekananda was not allowed to forget his Sudra origin even after he had won laurels for his country and his religion in Western countries and his great triumph at Chicago. This mentality is still widespread.

With the destruction of their woodland homes the rishis disappeared. Sadhus took their place, winning the homage of the multitude by their charity and forbearance. Monasteries were built in many places and these became centres of learning. The forest asramas were forgotten. An extensive network of religious and cultural institutions slowly spread over the country. These were independent of and unconnected with royal or baronial courts. Buddhists, Jains and Brahmans all sought and obtained admission to these institutions. The only condition was that they become celibates, preferably for life. Hindu monasteries were not above caste discrimination.

Wars were endemic in India. No king was without an army and there were many kings. Armies had to be kept in training. An annual excursion became almost an obligatory exercise. The sadhus, in asserting the superiority of non-violence over violence, therefore showed considerable courage. Vegetarianism became the rule for all monkish orders, Jain, Buddhist and Brahman, although animal sacrifice had been an integral part of Vedic ritual. The Buddhist bhikshu, however, was obliged by his vows to accept whatever was offered to him by way of food as alms by a householder. He could not refuse. Jains, on the other hand, went without food rather than eat meat.

In no other country in history have so many thousands of people adopted a vegetarian diet of their own free will. Beef was the staple food of the Aryans. Their wealth was calculated in heads of cattle. The slaughter of a cow for any reason whatever came to be strictly forbidden. He who killed a human being could plead extenuating circumstances and win pardon. Not so the wretch who killed a cow. One of the most intriguing mysteries of Indian history is just when, how and why a beef-eating race accustomed to ritual animal sacrifice underwent an inner conversion so deep and complete that beef became taboo. The cow and everything connected with it, even its excreta, became sacred. No other living creature has even been regarded as equally holy, neither Brahman nor guru nor king. Only the Ganga, a river, has been accorded equal sanctity.

The greatest contribution the Aryans made to Indian civilisation and unity was probably their language. Sanskrit was used in the courts of kings and nobles and by the learned. Priests, scholars and sadhus found in it a refined and effective means of communication. It was used everywhere without distinction of race, region or creed. The Buddhists generally preferred Pali and Prakrit, but made use of Sanskrit in their great universities. It is not generally known that a large part of Buddhist sacred literature is written in Sanskrit. Much of it was concerned with secular subjects like medicine and surgery. The Buddhist schools accepted pupils from everywhere. No discrimination was made on the basis of *jati* or *varna*. Even students from outside the country, spoken of generally as *mlechchhas* and *yavanas*, were eligible.

All subjects were taught in these Buddhist schools, although some doubt exists about the inclusion of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*. Both these were offensive to the ethical sense of the Buddhist clergy. The Brahmans enjoyed an advantage here. It is one of the paradoxes of Indian history that, while the Brahmans did not accept pupils who were not *dwijas*, twice-born, they taught everything to those they did accept—*dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Thus the Brahmans fostered the advancement of knowledge, discriminating at the same time against the *mlechchha*, the *yavana*, the *Sudra* and any others who were beyond the pale. This pale was not co-



extensive with India as we know it. It was delimited by holy rivers and no less holy mountains. The world of the Brahmans was one of circles within circles, physically and mentally concentric, which varied in degrees of purity. This obsession with ritual purity rendered it totally incapable of effective resistance to the Greeks and the Sakas. The Kushanas and Hunas also had an easy walkover. It was easier still for Turks and Arabs who came later.

Pre-Aryan India was, as we now have no difficulty in seeing, not a primitive woodland. It was inhabited by people with a highly developed culture. The home of the third oldest civilisation in the world lay in the North-west. Settlement on this frontier, all precaution notwithstanding, inevitably resulted in an intermixture of speech and blood. I sometimes wonder if Hindu mythology is not based on a racial memory going back to the civilisation the Aryans submerged. The Puranas, for example, seem to me to refer to a pre-Vedic period of which the only record is a dream-like recollection. If this is correct the battle of Kurukshetra was possibly fought by Pre-Aryans among whom un-Aryan customs like polyandry and niyoga were practised. (Niyoga is the practice of appointing a proxy for a deceased or living husband to beget children on his behalf by the widow or wife.) The philosophical interpretation of this battle found in the Bhagavad Gita could easily have been elaborated by the Aryans later.

Many mysteries will be cleared up once we firmly grasp the idea that the foundations of our very ancient culture were laid by Pre-Aryans, even in our religion and philosophy. All around us we see the Sanskritisation of non-Aryan names and the writers of the Puranas also must have had the idea that, to be acceptable, every word must have a Sanskrit root.

Not all the Pre-Aryans were equally cultured. There were more advanced and less advanced races among them. By 1500 B.C. the land was widely cultivated and agriculture of a sort flourished. Handicrafts were also well developed. The North-west had overseas contacts with Iran and Mesopotamia. The South had contacts with the islands to the East which are now known as Indonesia, and, possibly, even farther East. Trade was the ruling incentive. Golden Lanka did not get all her gold by mining her own hills. She had pearls and precious

stones to barter with. Those who suffer from an Aryan bias should learn to appreciate the Pre-Aryans. They were, after all, the first owners of the land. The Aryans dispossessed them slowly but not wholly. They were indispensable as hewers of wood and drawers of water. They also provided cannon fodder in all those wars, historical or not.

The only Aryans in the Ramayana war are the heroes Rama, and his brother. Their allies, the 'monkeys', were certainly Pre-Aryans. In the Mahabharata roughly eighteen lakhs were destroyed in the war. They, too, were no doubt Pre-Aryans. The Aryans kept the leadership in their own hands. Some of them must have had Pre-Aryan blood and came of Aryanised Pre-Aryan stock. Poets romanticised their Aryanness. It is said that Homer drew upon the Mycenaean civilisation that preceded the Greek. Valmiki and Vyasa probably likewise drew on the Pre-Aryan background. An Aryan tone and colour was added by Sanskritisation and Aryanisation. Originally the word 'Aryan' meant Aryan in speech but it came gradually to mean Aryan in blood. In reality the word meant neither. What mattered was whether a family belonged to a privileged section of the population within the VBKV, i.e., the Vedic Brahmana Kshatriya Vaisya ascendancy. Membership was most often determined by birth, but in the scramble for power and wealth the successful man was not infrequently elevated to a rank higher than the one he was born with. Learning was not so rewarded. Learning became a closed enclave, the vested interest of its propagators.

When we consider the high level of material culture reached in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro it becomes apparent that these peoples must also have had poets and savants and philosophers, singers and dancers and instrumentalists. Their engineers and architects were of no mean calibre. They certainly had a highly developed set or sets of belief also, a religious system that may have centered around the Great Mother Goddess and the Great Father God, symbolised by male and female genitalia. These forms of worship, driven underground by the Vedic, Buddhist and Jain traditions, may have perpetuated themselves down the ages as secret and esoteric sects with oral teaching. The Tantric and Yogic cults very probably took their rise in them. Hinduism took over the overt worship of the Divine

### **Mother and Holy Father.**

In the absence of solid evidence this is, of course, speculation but it is legitimate to use the imagination to throw light upon this period. Neither party to the confrontation between Aryan and Pre-Aryan has left any record. The Vedas were composed by rishis ignorant of the art of writing. We have had to rely upon the unaided memories of many generations of sons or disciples for the texts. To retain verses in the memory unaltered for three thousand years is a feat which it is only fair to consider beyond human power.

What we actually have is a one-sided story, a story related from the Aryan point of view. It would be interesting to have the Pre-Aryan version. In Iran the story that is accepted as authentic is that of a rival Aryan power with its own ambitious claims to the Indus region. The Indus valley changed hands many a time during the Late Ancient Period. It is easy to understand why the Indo-Aryans did not tarry long there. In the Ganga basin they felt and were more secure. That being the case the seeds of Pakistan were sown in pre-history. Our ancestors were quick to withdraw into a shell in order to preserve their way of life.

During the second World War, German writers who could not, or would not, flee from the Nazi terror resorted to what they called 'internal migration'. This was an inner withdrawal, not a physical one. Something of a similar nature possibly took place when the rishis retired into the forests to devote themselves to the cultivation of their souls. The performance of Vedic rites was left to professional priests, Brahmanas. The rishis were of all varnas and no varna. They were beyond classification of that kind. They may have been in, but they were not of, society. The towns were left to warriors and kings, merchants and workmen, agriculturists and hunters, craftsmen and their customers. If it is possible to deduce so much is it not also possible to assume the existence of musicians and actors, poets of love and romance, painters and sculptures and architects? If there was a king named Pururavas he must have had a palace befitting Urvashi, the divine apsara with whom he fell in love. Apsaras must have had earthly counterparts. The thesis that India was all spirit and no flesh cannot be sustained in the face of evidence that shows a high level of material advancement. The presence of a limited

number of rishis in forest schools does not warrant such a thesis. They are out of context. A forest civilisation, aranyaka sabhyata, is a contradiction in terms. If, however, we speak instead of a 'sylvan culture' no contradiction is involved.

The Aryavarta of the Middle Ancient Period was an extensive area inhabited by Dasas as well as by Aryans, Both sides had armed forces. The wealth and power of the Dasas did not descend miraculously from the skies. It grew from the soil through cultivation, skilled craftsmanship, trade and military organisation. The Dasas had a civilisation as well as a culture of their own. One can be sure they did not call themselves Dasas any more than Africans speak of themselves as Negroes. But since they left us no clue themselves we have to base our conjectures on the evidence left by their conquerors. Even the expression Pre-Aryan betrays a bias in favour of the conquerors. Why not use the word Adi Hindu instead? Or Proto-Indian? No people can be named after their conquerors. How we Indians chafed when we were described as British Indians!

By 600 B.C. a composite culture and a composite civilisation had evolved. The aliens had been absorbed. Natives had risen to the highest positions in the state, if not in society. For instance, the king of the Nanda dynasty who was deposed and slain by Chandragupta Maurya, with the aid of the wily Chanakya, was said to be of low caste, an unbeliever. He is described as a rich and powerful monarch, hostile to the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas. His army was composed of 20,000 horses, 2000 chariots, 3000 or 4000 elephants and 20,00,000 foot-soldiers. A military career had always been open to the lowest in the land. It was in the interest of the state to keep it so. Once enrolled as a soldier a man had the opportunity to display his skill and bravery. Like Karna in the Mahabharata he could rise to be Commander-in-Chief. The next step was to win a kingdom for himself and become a Kshatriya. A genealogy was at once provided and his lineage obligingly established as ancient and honourable. Those who made a fortune out of nothing through trade or agriculture were accorded the same or similar distinction. There is an account in Kavikankan's *Chandi* of how merchants used to take diamonds in exchange for pepper, pearls for pungent spicy

leaves; full advantage was taken of the simplicity of the Sinhalese. A list of other equally fabulous deals is given.

While the Indo-Greeks, the Sakas and the Kushanas were pouring into India from the North-west, Indians themselves were moving in an easterly direction, spreading out towards Indonesia, Indo-China and China. The former came in search of power. The latter left in search of wealth. Religion and culture were incidental. The *varna* system of society was permissive. A man could be a Kshatriya by *varna*, a Vaishnava by faith, a Saka by race. A Hindu king could, like his Anglo-Saxon counterpart, make a knight. The Vaishnava sadhus, like the Catholic clergy, could convert unbelievers. Race lost its identity within a few generations as Hindu names were adopted. A pure race is as much a fiction as noble blood,

In the period between the two great empires, the Maurya and the Gupta, the accent was on stability. A stable social order gradually evolved. The frame that held it firmly together was the *varna-asrama dharma*. It was implemented in a structural or constitutional sense, not as a creed. According to this social charter a Brahman was a Brahman if his father and mother were Brahmans, regardless of *guna* or *karma*.

These two words, *guna* and *karma*, were retained but the original meaning was modified. The *guna* of a Brahman was said to be *sattva-guna*, that of a Kshatriya *rajo-guna* and that of a Sudra]or Vaisya *tamo-guna*. *Sattva* means inner purity, *rajas* means outer activity, and *tamas* means inertia, inactivity with attendant stagnation. If these new definitions did not correspond to reality, so much the worse for reality. Karma came to mean what a man deserved in consequence of his deeds, good and bad, and his achievements in a former life. No evidence was required other than the fact of birth. If a man was born a Sudra it was considered self-evident that he had committed some reprehensible act in a previous life. Why else should he not have been born a Brahman? The same logic applied to women also. A woman in pain is often heard to exclaim, even today, "What have I done to deserve this? Why did I have to be born a woman?" We are left to imagine a world in which there are neither women nor Sudras. In that case, surely, we would be forced to invent sin.

What the law of Karma originally meant was: you reap-

what you sow. The chain of cause and effect has little to do with a chain of incarnations which may be wholly imaginary. But the social need to keep women and Sudras docile was so great an entire ethical code had to be devised and all opposition forestalled. Good and evil were emptied of their moral content. To protest against or disobey the rules of a social constitution that was sacrosanct became the only evil. Submission without demur became good. Indoctrination was so thorough that no Hindu entertained the idea of revolt or even of a reformatory movement that might alter to some extent a social set-up sanctioned by the sastras of the Brahmans and the sword of the king. The result was an establishment almost as holy as the cow. It was inflexible. Society became more stable than the state. Who was going to lay down his life in defence of an institution that guarded a social order built on injustice ?

By 600 B.C. India had seen the rise and fall of an urban civilisation followed by the rise and decline of a sylvan culture. By 600 A.D. India had witnessed the rise and fall of two great empires with far-reaching extensions overseas and overland. Their expansion had been cultural and religious as well as commercial. India had also seen the influx of Greeks and Sakas and Kushanas. With them came fresh ideas and new, invigorating blood. Her arts and sciences were vastly enriched by the addition of their knowledge and expertise. Two great ethical religions had arisen, one of which had a universal appeal. Reverence for life characterised the teaching of both. Two great devotional movements followed. These taught total surrender of the self to God. Two great epics had taken shape out of an oral tradition that had preserved the legends, tales and historical events men thought important down the ages. Much of it was certainly Pre-Aryan, contemporary with the sylvan culture of which we have spoken. Both these epics exercised a pervasive and formative influence, shaping the character and culture of the people in general. Visual art owed everything to it and so did literature. Remarkable systems of philosophy, logic, grammar, rhetorics, politics, erotics, aesthetics, medicine and astronomy were developed. Dance, drama, music, painting, sculpture and other arts were pursued to perfection. So was Sanskrit and Tamil poetry. Architecture attained a new grandeur and magnificence. Noble cities sprang up all over

the land.

The Golden age of the Guptas was the apogee of the ancient period. There had been nothing like it before. There has been nothing like it since. But it cannot be described as a renaissance in any sense of the word, much less can it be called a Hindu renaissance. A renaissance inaugurates. It does not terminate. The Golden age of the Guptas restored the Vedic authority from which the Brahmans derived their supremacy as Lords Spiritual. The Brahmanical Hindus did not experience an upsurge of fresh inspiration or a revival of vigour strong enough to bring them out of a period of Buddhist ascendancy unaided. The latter-day Kshatriyas, a *nouveau riche* class, functioned as Lords Temporal. Society was feudal. Society in Europe passed through a similar phase during the same period of history. Although there was nothing that could be called a Hindu Church great monastic orders sprang up all over India under the leadership of Sankaracharya and other powerful ascetics. These corresponded to the militant orders of Christendom, the Church Militant, in their totality. But this revival among the Hindus was largely a result of the opposition to the powerful Buddhist Sangha. It waned as the Sangha lost its hold and the Buddhist kingdoms fell. Buddhism had never had more than a limited appeal in the land of its birth, much like Christianity in Palestine. It did not enjoy exclusive patronage. Jainism fared no better. When the Golden Age of the Guptas came to an end, India entered upon a period of decline. It was the Early Medieval Era. India was a very very old country by that time. She was weary and jaded in spirit despite periedic infusions of fresh blood and vigour through repeated invasions and overseas contacts.

Whenever we look back at our hoary past our attention is held only by those features of it which appear to us beautiful and noble and great. Distance lends enchantment. We fail to see the feet of clay on which this Golden Age of the Guptas was erected, feet incapable of supporting the weight of the vast superstructure. India, unlike China, failed to evolve a centralised administrative system run by a civil service recruited by means of open competition throughout the country. There was no permanent central armed force either. Such an army existed for a limited span of time as long as paramount power lasted.

The North-west frontier was left to the local army of whoever happened to rule Gandhara or Punjab or Kashmir or Sind. It was the same in the North-east. The people who lived in the heart of the country were protected by geography and were not much perturbed by the prospect of invasion. Neither were the people of the South. The rest of India enjoyed no such immunity. Waves of conquest swept over the land like tides when a border chieftain defected to the enemy or failed to stem the advance of hostile hordes. Neither the priests nor the astrologers could ward off the disastrous consequences. Fortunately the land surface was large and the successive waves thinned as they spread, subsiding more or less innocuously. The conquerors were themselves ultimately vanquished by the richness and beauty of the culture and religion they discovered.

Until the appearance of the Islamic religion and its attendant Arabic-Persian culture this process was adequate but it lost its efficacy when confronted with this virile creed. It failed again when Christianity arrived, bringing European culture with it. Dealing with these masterful influences was no easy matter. The conquerors were not conquered. A compromise had to be found that permitted mutual accommodation. To live and let live was the best policy. The Hindus adjusted to these late arrivals without too much strain by a process of which I shall speak in my lectures on the later periods. A new dimension was introduced. The problem had not arisen at any time previously, in spite of the existence of a rich diversity of belief and practice. There is no use shutting our eyes to India's many faces in our zeal to establish her essential unity.

Before the Early Medieval Period the Hindus were supremely confident. They knew their adversaries could and would be won over to a way of life that was superior to any they had known. Occasional defeats on the battlefield did not bother them overmuch. The late Ancient Period had climaxed in the Golden Age of the Guptas and a saga of three thousand years of steady growth ended in a blaze of glory. There was every reason to hope. The richness of the country had overflowed its frontiers and spread widely both in the East and the West. Towards the end of the Ancient Period there were only two great civilisations left still capable of expansion. They were India and China. Greece, Rome and Iran



had dropped behind. A third came into the picture with the rise of Islam.

The constellation of countries that orbited around India began to drift away. India's influence slowly waned. Her grip on them loosened. These countries were not held to her as parts of an empire or commonwealth. No colonial or political bond existed between them. India's decline therefore cannot be compared to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Neither the princes nor the peoples of Sri Lanka, Burma, Malay, Indonesia, Indo-China, Thailand, Tibet and Central Asia were in any way subordinate to Indian tutelage or rule. Nor were they attached to India as appendages. What they took was taken freely, of their own accord. They made the Jatakas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata their own, accepted Sanskrit as a convenient lingua franca and became Buddhists or Vaishnavas or Saivas as suited them. The Indian system of learning held a natural attraction for them. Even China, Korea and Japan welcomed Buddhism. Sanskrit was adopted to a lesser degree. Scholars from all these distant lands came to study in India and were cordially received. Indians travelled by sea to far away ports and foreigners likewise came to India by sea. Overland trade was matched by maritime trade. There does not appear to have been any clash of interest with China or other Eastern countries. Colonialism or imperialism as we have known it in modern times did not exist. With Iran and Arabia conflicts may have arisen but these had nothing to do with religion for they had not yet adopted Islam. Both of them were powerful countries, Arabia commercially and Iran militarily. India did not expand westwards.

As I look back at the remote past of this sub-continent I am struck by the lack of insularity in the mental make-up of the people. It was not isolated from the rest of the world. But the concept of a land in the midst of the sea remained in the memory of the people. With the mighty wall of the Himalayas shutting it off from the mainland of Asia on the North, a wall that was not, like the Great Wall of China, man-made India was in effect an island, though literally a peninsula.

As sea routes became more and more perilous trade and

travel by sea dwindled and with it also dwindled overland travel. Fewer and fewer scholars came from the East and fewer and fewer Indians went abroad. The invasion of marauding armies became India's last link with the outside world. By degrees she became more and more insular in feeling and mood. The national memory of India as an island was stronger than the memory of its wide unfolding over Eastern lands and seas. Yet in our fairy tales we hear of princes who with their friends crossed the seven seas and thirteen rivers in the course of their adventures. The prince wins a foreign princess and brings her home as his bride. She becomes his queen. In the tales associated with the Mangal Kavyas of Bengal there are merchant princes who travelled to distant countries in high-prowed ships to the glory of folk deities.

The Vedic pantheon was not the only one known to the Hindus. Puranic deities were far more numerous than Vedic ones and every locality had its own gods and goddesses. The snake goddess Manasa appears to have been quite as popular as Chandi if we are to judge from the number of books devoted to her. Buddhists had their own pantheons of which some overlapped the Hindu. These deities rendered homage to the Buddha who was a mortal. Here was a case not of a man worshipping gods but of gods bowing in veneration before a man. Humanism took precedence over Theism, Man becomes the starting point of divinity, not God.

One after the other Buddhism, Christianity and Islam came, each establishing a new order that took the place of the old. They took the world by storm. Both Buddhism and Christianity spread so widely that they eventually lost their foothold in their own countries. Islam suffered no displacement of this kind. It remains firmly set in the place of its origin. Buddhism had, however, become a spent force in India by the time Islam appeared. Brahmanical Hinduism, with a sudden upsurge of renewed strength was reasserting itself. That Buddhism should have gone into such a decline in the land of its birth is astonishing when we consider how vigorous it still is in Japan today. But, in comparison to Islam, both Brahmanical Hinduism and Buddhism were decadent.

The older orders in every ancient civilisation have rested on

a slave or serf base. No new order that left this base undisturbed was worthy of its name. Buddhism, for some reason or other, left the social hierarchy untouched. The poor, oppressed and outcast eventually turned to Islam. Islam found acceptance in the areas where Buddhism was making a last stand. When it departed it left a vacuum. Islam filled it easily.

The past was not and never is a flashback of the present. I am a patriot but a patriot with an open mind. There are always surprises. One surprise could be the discovery that Sumeria and the Indus valley had greater affinity for each other than the Indus valley and Gangetic basin, or Aryavarta, and the Dravidian heartland. Geographical and demographical considerations certainly affected social organisation. Social history may have to be rewritten. A new explanation of the origin of the caste system may emerge. A revision of the history of religion may also become advisable. It may even be that the earliest culture in India is traceable to the Middle East, to the shores of the Euphrates and the Tigris. It may even come about that, for many things holy, we must turn our faces away from the Ganga to these other rivers. Mesopotamia, situated halfway between Europe and India, may link the Iliad and the Ramayana, Greece and India, giving these great epics echoes that go back farther in time than is usually thought.

As a young man I was taught to think of the Indus valley as the cradle of the Aryan civilisation. It became also the homeland of the Pre-Aryan civilisation of India when Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa were discovered. This was a blow to Aryan sentiment but it did not bother the Indian patriot for the Indus valley was located in India. In my young days I, like many others, liked the idea of Aryan antecedents, but now I am reconciled to my Pre-Aryan heritage for I find myself all the richer for it. But, though I am now an alien in the Indus valley, I am still an Indian with an Indian mind. I may find it more than distressing to be forced to leave the Indus behind in my search for my beginnings and travel to the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, beyond 2500 B.C. My heart was broken in 1947 when the country I knew as India was split into two disparate and disharmonious parts. To be forced to acknowledge a Middle Eastern origin might well break it a second time. But

will in the process I shall be enriched even more and my heritage grow greater as new light is thrown upon the remote past.

One of the most puzzling things in Indian history is India's attitude to Iran and Iran's attitude to India. During the Middle Ancient Period their religions and their languages were similar in many ways and derived from a single source. Yet they fell out, much as the Greeks and Trojans did. Was it economic rivalry that estranged them or a war? I am deeply interested in the stretch of land that bridges the gap between India and Greece, acting as a strange and mysterious wedge as well as a link. It has also functioned as a bridge between China and Greece. It has both separated and united the East and the West. Imperial Iran was a mighty bulwark built on the cross-roads of civilisation. At that time it was fertile and its fields and cities were rich and prosperous. No history of India will be complete until it includes in its scope China, Central Asia, Iran and Arabia, all of which countries have been intimately associated with India down the ages. How close Indian history has been bound up with that of Great Britain during the past two hundred years we all know. Its ties with the Middle East and Central Asia were no less close during the reign of Turks and Moguls. India has its place in the histories of the Sakas, Hunas and Kushanas as well as in Grecian and Chinese history. A study of Roman and Egyptian history will also be profitable for South India has much to do with it. Nearest of all was Iran. The Indus valley came under its rule more than once.

All that happened before 600 B.C. is Pre-History. The Early Ancient and Middle Ancient Periods are therefore pre-historic periods. These periods cannot be reconstructed in our imagination with a great degree of certainty until more material is available. At present the historicity of the Mahabharata and Ramayana is a matter of speculation. These works may not be more than historical novels of a kind. Both reveal a stage of civilisation that is highly interesting and probably existed in the Middle Ancient Period. If they do have a historical basis the events had probably been long forgotten by the time they were written. The vivid descriptions may be imaginative reconstructions only. Their value is largely literary and ethical. Consecutive editors have given them spiritual significance. What is

most important about them is that they have provided source material for countless subsequent epics, dramas, verses and songs which could not have come into existence at all without them. In their turn also they were the creation of a long oral tradition of song and story. They are, therefore, the creation of no one single person but of an entire people, the expression of their joint life experience.

By the end of the Late Ancient Period India had evolved two mighty institutions to ensure social security : the caste system and the undivided joint family. Even though the state withered away or was captured by foreign invaders these two deeply rooted banyan and pipal trees would hold steady, mingling their branches to shelter the threatened human beings cowering in their shade. Caste and family provided the maximum protection. Consequently the state did not evolve beyond a point. The idea of equality before the law or the liberty of the citizen did not develop. even as an abstract concept. These were things nobody considered attainable in this world, the world into which we are born. It was taken for granted that nothing better than what existed in the Dwapara Yuga could be expected in the Kali Yuga, and that nothing better in the Treta Yuga than what existed in the Satya Yuga. Each mythological age marked a decline from a divine primordial condition. All that was past was best and all that was best was past. No civilisation can progress if its eyes are fixed on what has gone before and no culture can keep pace with the Reality of the present and the future, if it is backward-looking.

## THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The Medieval Period of Indian history lasted about twelve hundred years. For convenience I have divided it into two halves of equal duration : the Early Medieval and the Late Medieval.

In the seventh century Kanauj replaced Pataliputra as the seat of paramountcy. It was the capital of Harshavardhana. He was a Buddhist by faith. The empire he built did not survive him but Kanauj retained its importance as the most notable kingdom in North India, if not in the whole of India, for a long time afterwards. The centuries that followed may justifiably be described as the age of Rajput ascendancy. Bengal, ruled by the Pala dynasty whose kings were Buddhists, was outside the sphere of its influence. The South was ruled by various other kings, among them Jains. Ultimately the Jains gave up politics and turned to trade, concentrating on the West coast. The Buddhists were gradually reduced to political impotence, except in the peripheral areas. The Brahmanical Hindus took over, and, by and large, the Early Medieval Period belonged to them. But, like the Buddhists, they too became subservient to monastic orders of various denominations. These orders were rivals of the Jains and Buddhists. The Buddhist Sangha had no equivalent among the Brahmanical Hindus. Neither was there any equivalent to the Christian Church. Yet, everywhere in the Medieval Period, ascetics came to be more highly regarded than householders. Celibacy was esteemed and

became an ideal. Monks of all descriptions had an edge over other classes of citizens not only in religious matters but affairs of state. This was paralleled by the developments in Europe during the same period.

Buddhism was and still is, relegated to border areas in the North-east. It pursued its own independent course, spreading far beyond India's borders, travelling as far as Japan and Indo-China. In Sri Lanka it retained its pristine form. Gradually Brahmanical Hinduism forced Buddhism to withdraw almost entirely from India's mainland and the rising tide of Islam stepped up the pressure.

The vacuum left by the withdrawal of Buddhism from the heartland of India has never been adequately filled for there is no substitute for the social ethics of the Buddhist fraternity. For over fifteen centuries Indian artists and idealists have found inspiration in it. Three of India's greatest emperors were Buddhists; Asoka, Kanishka and Harshavardhana. Other sovereigns of lesser stature were also guided by its teachings. One of them was Dharmapala.

Hindu society had an inner circle formed of those who were dwija, twice-born, and who wore the sacred thread. They constituted an elite that was very secure in its superiority. The other castes were excluded to an extent that confined them to the outer circles of Hinduism. The dwijas were sheltered, as Aryavarta was sheltered: others lived on the frontiers of their faith. Those furthest removed from the dwija centre were the outcasts and untouchables. Buddhism appealed to them strongly and it was among them that it first found ready acceptance.

Islam appealed to the same classes of people in a similar way and so did, at a later date, Christianity. Islam entered India through Sind in the eighth century. Later incursions were made through Gandhara, Kashmir and the Punjab. It spread rapidly among the outer castes. These were the only castes that questioned Brahmanical superiority. The domination of the Brahmanas was rooted firmly in the infallibility of the Vedas. Converts to Islam were given Arabic names and became members of a brotherhood of equals. Their inferior caste status was forgotten. They ceased to be Hindus, entirely, either in religion or as members of an unequal and unjust

hierarchical society. Nevertheless, as residents in a particular geographical area culturally also they continued to answer to the description of Hindu. It was not long, however, before their identification with Islam was so complete they ceased to think of themselves as having any affinity whatsoever with their caste fellows. The Turks and Moguls continued what the Arabs had begun. While the Greeks, the Sakas and the Kushanas had capitulated to Indian culture the Arabs, Turks and Moguls did not. Instead if Indianising themselves they Islamised India, reversing a process that had been traditional up to that time. The areas and the people affected were both remote from the centre. What was happening in no way disturbed the equanimity of the Brahmanas or others among the higher castes. Their sensibilities were outraged however by the imposition of a discriminatory poll tax, the *jizya*, and by the systematic desecration of their temples and destruction of their idols. Also by the slaughter of cows and the eating of beef.

If these tactless acts had been avoided Islam might have enjoyed a moral victory which would have outlasted physical conquest and made for a greater understanding and wider acceptance of its message, a message of universal import, not only for converts, but for all humanity. A large part of the population of India was Islamised but the Hindu world remained unaffected. It was and remained as impervious to it as the Christian world of Europe. The fanatical followers of the Prophet probably believed they could conquer completely by the sword. Iran and Syria and Egypt had been so conquered. But they underrated the solid strength of the hard core of Hindu India. Where Islam failed by its harshness the culture of Persia succeeded. Persian civilisation was accepted and the worlds of India and the Middle East reconciled within its refined and elegant ambience.

But India was gradually to become more and more isolated. The Sumerian civilisation of which I spoke in my last lecture, was followed by the Babylonian. Other civilisations developed in neighbouring regions. The Arabs were the most recent conquerors of Mesopotamia. Their cultural legacy was a glorious one. Islam did not disown its Jewish and Christian heritage. The Prophet claimed only to be the last of a long



secession of Semitic prophets, beginning with Abraham. The Arab Muslims were so fired by their religious faith that their ardour carried them across deserts and seas. In the process they acquired a new, very practical knowledge of the world. They studied Greek philosophy, astronomy, medicine and taught these to Europeans in their turn for the Europeans had lost contact with their Greek ancestors. As Arab sea power grew, dominating both the Mediterranean and the Indian oceans, sea voyages inevitably became more and more perilous for others, the Hindus among them. They also became less profitable. Seafaring was declared out of bounds for Hindus eventually, ostensibly for fear of contamination by mlechchha contact, but the real reason, a much better one, was security. Overland travel was likewise forbidden. India shrank into herself, retreating into an inner isolation that was also physical. Trade dwindled. Expansion came to a stop.

China also was a closed country for a time. There may be another explanation for India's isolation. Overland trade routes from India to China and from India to Europe passed through Central and West Asian territory. Both these routes were exposed to the predatory activities of the Arabs. The Turks imitated them. They too embraced Islam and took Arabic names. Europe was effectively cut off from India and China. India and China were cut off from Europe and the Mediterranean world. China was cut off from India. India was cut off from China. Three areas were simultaneously isolated from each other. The sea routes between India and China, and between China and Europe, were also blocked.

India's chief loss during the Early Medieval Period was the loss of the North-western sector of her territory. It was valued, as we have seen, because India's overland trade with Europe depended upon it. Her trade with China also depended upon it. Apart from that it had little importance. It was not part of the holy land. The Brahmanas regarded it as a contaminated area. Most of the people were Buddhists anyway. What did it matter to the Brahmanas of Aryavarta if Buddhists turned Muslims? Were they not already defiled by contact with mlechchhas and yavanas and untouchables? Did Buddhists not accept food and drink from the hands of such persons?

The Muslims, in their turn, regarded both the Hindus and Buddhists as idolaters. The great university at Takshasila certainly fared no better than Nalanda in Muslim hands. The teachers were probably forced to take their books and flee for lives. They fled to Tibet, to China and to Indonesia. Many valuable books were lost to India forever although a few have been recovered in Chinese and Tibetan translations.

Neither Hinduism nor Buddhism at any time prohibited music, dancing, painting, sculpture or the drama. In this they differed markedly from the puritanical attitude of Islam and Christianity towards the arts. The result was the growth of an aesthetic maturity among the people which was so pervasive that, even in a decadent period, the artist and the artisan lacked neither appreciation nor commissions. Lords and commoners, men and women of all walks of life shared this sense of the beautiful. During walking tours of North Bengal districts I have seen exquisite pieces of sculpture lying in every nook and corner, some broken and some covered with dust. All of them dated from the Early Medieval Period. How they weathered centuries of sun and wind and rain and vandalism is a mystery. The temples or viharas which housed them had been razed to the ground. Mounds of rubble overgrown with scanty vegetation was all that remained. The better preserved of the sculptures had already been removed to museums at the time of my visit but even the marred ones left behind deserved to be preserved.

It is not difficult to imagine what happened to structures of wood or other material. How could paintings survive when images made of stone were broken and pitted? But for the chance discovery of the *Charyapada* manuscripts in Nepal, a discovery that took place in this century, these poems would have never been known. They were composed by Buddhist monks a thousand years ago. Similar manuscripts disappeared with the destruction of the Buddhist monasteries. They were written on perishable material. Some of them were carried away by fleeing monks. This accounts for their presence in Nepal and other countries to the North. If we wish to reconstruct India's past we must turn to the Buddhist monasteries that remain and delve more deeply into the treasure they still contain. Unfortunately many have been destroyed by vandals.

Although the Early Medieval Period is generally defined as a period of decline it was also germinal. The modern languages of India, languages with rich and extensive literatures, took shape at this time. The exceptions were perhaps some South Indian languages. These were older still. Modern writers are proud to claim the *Charyapadas* and they are claimed by many whose respective tongues later evolved on independent lines. The development of any literature requires a steady influx of ideas and stimulating contacts. Sanskrit, the old Mother, could not supply these in sufficient quantity. They had to be sought abroad, fetched from across the seas or lifted out of the folk lore of the people on the land. This folk culture pursued its own development undisturbed down the ages. The elite considered it beneath their notice and it did not depend upon the patronage of kings or courts. The new languages welcomed it and distinctive regional cultures evolved.

Relations between the Buddhists and Brahmanical Hindus had been strained for a long time. They had philosophical, theological and ideological differences that led to many disputes, even among adherents who came from the same castes and for the most part belonged to the same class. The Buddhists occupied a position in Hindu society not dissimilar to that occupied by the Marxists of the present day. Their ideas were subversive and they wished to impose them through an authority, the authority either of a king or of a powerfully organised sangha. No king could accommodate subversive ideas and none did. The Sangha also took no action that might be considered subversive. But the influence the Buddhists exercised over the masses made them a potential source of disaffection to the Establishment. The Establishment was in the hands of Brahman priests, ministers and officials. They retained control of it with the help of their monopoly of Sanskrit.

Sanskrit had long ceased to be the language of natural conversation and had become the medium of higher learning and of official transactions. No theatrical performances in Sanskrit were staged outside the courts; and even in the royal theatre many of the actors spoke Prakrit. Sanskrit retained its supremacy in complex intellectual discourse but warmth of feeling demanded an easier and more natural speech. The

ordinary actor knew little and the impurity of his pronunciation was sure to outrage a sophisticated audience of courtiers. Sanskrit drama, for this reason, did not develop and nothing remotely comparable to Greek drama evolved. The people preferred plays in their own dialects and *yatras* became popular. Sanskrit was confined to theological and philosophical studies chiefly concerning the Puranas and commentaries on the Sastras. Poetry was repetitive, the subjects being drawn mostly from the epics, but until these works were translated they were not generally understood.

The three things considered of the greatest importance in life were purity of speech, purity of blood and purity of conduct. Purity of blood was a fiction. The insistence upon purity of speech drove Sanskrit out of circulation, a gold coin hoarded by a miser. The injunction about conduct caused much mischief. Men and women were required to adhere to a code that had little to do with ethics or civilised manners. Even Rajputs were so afraid of pollution that each man carried his own cooking pot with him to battle and cooked for himself. Muslims, on the other hand, ate out of a single pot. Dipping one's hand into the same pot as a dozen others might not be a hygienic practice. Some of the Hindu rules may have had some justification. They may have been intended originally to safeguard health, but the extreme fear of pollution handicapped the movements of those who practised them. What the upper classes did was imitated slavishly by everybody. The habits of an entire people came to be regulated by an extreme fear of ritual pollution.

No satisfactory explanation of the disappearance of Buddhism from its homeland has been produced. It continues to flourish to this day in Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea, Japan, Indo-China, Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka. It may be that the decadence was confined to the Sangha, an organisation of monks and nuns and therefore open to corruption. Or the Sangha may have split into factions as a result of too much success. The vast number of sects claiming to be Buddhist amazed me when I visited Japan. These reflected the characteristics which divide Hinduism into cults like Vaishnavism, Saivism, Tantricism and Yoga. Each Hindu sect appeared to have had a Buddhist counterpart in India itself. The relationship between

them was probably not one of religious enmity but of organisational hostility. All had monastic orders. Sankaracharya was a monk. The ultimate victory was his.

The Hindus of the Early Medieval period, in spite of their wonderful temples, beautiful statuary and exquisite handicrafts, lived in an unreal world. The challenge of the changing times could not be met with platitudes about the timeless and changeless character of India. There was no lack of learning and talent, no dearth of bravery in the field, no want of skill in manufacture. The land was full of wise men and saints. Merchants were enterprising, artists were flourishing and courtesans maintained a high standard of song and dance. The peasants too were hard-working and patient. What, then, was wrong? How was it that kingdoms fell before the onslaught of the Turks as they penetrated the inner sanctum of Aryavarta and advanced Eastwards as far as Bengal which they took without resistance?

For six hundred years India had been without an empire and therefore lacked the cohesion a central administrative service and a central command for the armed forces could have given it. Local armies raised by local princes to fight internal wars were not adequate to defend the country from external threat, even if it had been possible for them to join hands. In 1200 A. D. India was not a disarmed country, yet there was no sign of effective popular resistance. The Turks were even welcomed by a section of the people who hailed them as gods in disguise, come to punish evil-doers and set the people free from oppressive exactions. There were some Hindus on the Muslim side and some Muslims on the Hindu side in most of the battles that were fought. No straight confrontation between Hindus and Muslims took place. The fighting forces were not as conscious of their religious differences as of racial differences as between Turks and Rajputs. They easily formed military alliances. Each borrowed freely from the others in matters of religion. Indian Muslims became very different from the Muslims of Arabia and post-Islamic Hindus also became different from pre-Islamic ones.

In his conversation with Eckermann, Goethe observed that Germany, unlike England or France, was a country that did not have a single centre. The India of the Hindus can be described similarly. Pataliputra was an imperial capital twice but did

not retain its eminence. Kanauj took its place and succeeded for some time. Varanasi could only be a most holy place of pilgrimage. Nothing else suited it. Delhi was not ready, nor was it more centrally located than Pataliputra. The South was too far away to be governed effectively from it. In the event of an invasion from the sea Delhi would be powerless.

India has always been a country of regional centres and these have been bound together in a single unit only occasionally and for comparatively short historical periods. In my first lecture I spoke of six regional circles. The two poles should not be forgotten. The pole of the Aryans in the north and the Dravidian pole in the south. During the first two parts of the Ancient Period there was little communication between them and during the third communication was largely confined to the coastal areas, first in the West and then in the East. The Early Medieval Period saw warriors from the South invading the North, a reversal of the earlier southward movement of the Aryans. The Southern warriors failed to gain a permanent foothold, however. The bringing together of the North and South under a single leadership was not accomplished until the arrival of the British. They made their capital at Calcutta which was a sort of half way for both.

The integration of North and South is still incomplete and we should not, therefore, regard it as an accomplished fact in our review of Ancient and Medieval India. Cultural links were limited in spite of comprehensive religious movements. Sanskrit was the strongest and practically the sole link between writers in the North and writers in the South. A greater unifying factor was trade. Trade extended to all parts of India and went beyond its borders. Maritime trade in the South continued for a long time even after the shrinkage that began in the Early Medieval Period. Indian seamen piloted the fleet of Vasco da Gama from Melinda in East Africa to Calicut. They knew the routes better than anyone else. It is obvious that, in spite of the Brahmanic ban on sea voyages, Indians from the South engaged in extensive trade with East Africa. There is also a legend that the Red Sea fleet of King Solomon was built and manned at Chittagong. The laskars are famous seamen to this day.

The acquisition of knowledge depends upon experience of the

real world and unless this experience is continually renewed the growth of knowledge is hampered. Fresh experience brings fresh knowledge, feeding the intellectual life of the country. Paucity of physical experience is no obstacle to those who explore spiritual reality. If there is any one sphere in which medieval India remained unvanquished it was religious and mystical experience. India at this time produced an unbroken series of saints and holy men whose equanimity no invader could disturb. For her religious aspirants India provided many secluded retreats. Her wandering sadhus did not want for accommodation in hospices built by the devout. The caves of the Himalayas were always there to provide them with shelter. They could and did subsist on very little. Their wants were not difficult to satisfy. Humble folk could supply them. Vaishnavism and Saivism were almost as democratic as Buddhism and Jainism. They welcomed the fallen and outcast, giving them a new status and refuge.

It is to Islam, however, that the greatest credit goes in promoting social justice and democracy within its fold. If the Arabs achieved phenomenal success it was because they made common cause with the underdog. Islam did not favour either priests or kings. The Muslims of the seventh century made no special provision for them in their social constitution. There was however, revisionism of a kind not dissimilar to what we now see in Communist countries. The kings and priests came in by the back door under different names. By the time the Turks established a Sultanate in Delhi, the spirit of early Islam had evaporated. It was more of a doctrine than a just social order and the State was more of an oligarchy than a commonwealth.

The Arabs were on good terms with Hindus for centuries before the rise of Islam. It was in their interest as Arabs to maintain that friendship, although on occasion it might be in the interest of Islam to precipitate a conflict. The same applied to the Turks and the Central Asians. Many of them were ex-Buddhists. It was in the interest of Turks as well as Afghans and Pathans to maintain old political alliances and economic ties though it might be in the interest of Islam to smash Hindu idols and demolish Hindu temples. Every human being has within him an economic man, a political man, a

religious man. In a country where his is not the only religion he cannot always function as a religious partisan. Had India been a small country which the Arabs or Turks could take by storm they might have been able to ignore Hindu feelings. As it was, they knew that the whole of India could not be conquered and converted by the sword and that, if such a thing was attempted, the Hindus would rally and counter-attack. The very size of India guaranteed that they would have the time. The Arabs were traders, like the British, and actually they had little desire to conquer and convert. They drew the line along the Indus river, making occasional forays across it. The Turks depended upon Hindu traders and bankers for finance and military hardware. They employed a Hindu staff of revenue collectors. The Hindu principalities which paid tribute enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy within the area under Turkish control. The Turks also permitted Hindu barons and knights to exercise their hereditary rights.

The official language was Persian. Hindus who learnt it were given posts, although a certain percentage of such posts was reserved for Muslims, preferably Muslims of foreign extraction. All Hindus without exception could learn Arabic and Persian and since many were prohibited from the study of Sanskrit they qualified themselves for high positions under the Turks and Moguls, turning their backs on the old regime. The new set-up had much to offer to people who belonged to outer or untouchable castes. Military service was also thrown open to them later. Economic power did not change hands for the economy continued to be controlled by *baniyas*, merchant burghers. It was only political power that was taken over. Hindu rulers lost their sovereignty after thousands of years. The Hindu state went out of existence. Hindus found themselves subject to Turks and Moguls. It made a vital difference. The same situation occurred the British, hundreds of years later. Hindus found themselves subject to British rule. This analogy, however, is not exact. Outside the Turkish and Mogul spheres of influence there were Hindu rulers who continued to be as independent as before. There were also powerful Hindu principalities that were autonomous even inside the Turkish and Mogul state. Sovereignty meant suzerainty in their case. Everywhere in India a Hindu could hold his head high during the late



**Medieval Period except where a ruler happened to be a fanatical Muslim. The Indian 'Muslim state' owed no allegiance to the Caliph and never became Islamic in the sense that Pakistan is, a state in which an idolator must either accept Islam or leave the country or face death. Such a choice was never forced upon a Hindu in the history of India even by the most fanatical king.**

The country as a whole did not lose its independence. The Indians remained an independent people. Even the Turks became Indianised to some extent, although they did not become Hinduised. At one time the terms 'Hindu' and 'Indian' had been interchangeable. They now lost their synonymity. Muslims made no distinction between Buddhists, Jains and Brahmanical Hindus. The Hindus did. The term 'Hindu' gradually came to mean Brahmanical Hindus in general. Yet 'Hindu' law remained common to all these denominations. I discovered that the term 'Hindu' includes Ismailia Khojas in the matter of succession in a certain Act of the Central Legislature of British India. This means that, legally speaking, Mr Jinnah was as much a Hindu as Mahatma Gandhi.

I have known whole villages voluntarily to embrace Islam for the simple reason that Hindu barbers and washermen refused to shave them or wash their clothes. Under the Hindu code barbers do not shave outcast or low caste people. Neither do washermen do their laundering. In course of time this came to apply to millions of people. But when these same people embraced Islam the same barbers and the same washermen had no objection to doing their work. The caste bar no longer applied. It is not generally realised that for hundreds of years Hindus and Muslims have both been served by the same barbers and washermen. No discrimination is made in the utilisation of their services. But they cannot ignore the ban Hindus impose upon those of whom they disapprove. All Muslims receive equal treatment. Hindu society, on the other hand, can think of no better way of punishing dissidents than denying them the services of barbers and washermen. This has naturally led to widespread conversion to Islam and to Christianity also, for the same reasons. Dissidents bypass any ban that may be imposed upon them by changing their religious affiliation.

**The Arabs and Turks did not bring with them everything**

they required by way of service. They had to share existing facilities with Hindus or obtain them by training converts. Forcible conversion gained them nothing. People could migrate en masse to any of the Hindu kingdoms on the periphery of the Sultanate. And where were the new Muslim lords to find new occupations for those converts who did not wish to continue their hereditary or caste occupations? If barbers continued to be barbers and washermen continued to launder there was every likelihood of Hindu practices entering the Islamic fold. Mere Arabic names could not prevent that. In India Islam was confronted by a non-competitive society with a tradition of thousands of years behind it. Religious change did not automatically bring about social change. To try to force it would only result in chaos. So the Turks and after them the Moguls, adopted the Hindu principle of live and let live. The social order was not disturbed but the Brahman-Kshatriya ascendancy was challenged before long by the Omrah-Ulema ascendancy which arose about this time. Today we have been thrown off balance by persistent and irritating Hindu-Muslim differences, wars, endemic riots and the partition of the country. Even as late as 1947 Rajput Hindu families married into Rajput Muslim families in the Punjab. Such a state of affairs is inconceivable to the present generation. Such unions were interdenominational but they were not intercaste. A Rajput married a Rajput. Both belonged to the same class and caste.

For over a thousand years Hindus and Muslims strove to find and give effect to a cultural compromise that would be acceptable to both. A Muslim professor who has taken medieval literature as his special field of study told me that, prior to the fifteenth century, Muslims and Hindus shared the same culture. Divergences had not appeared. The general culture of the country was Indian culture. Muslims wrote Bengali or Hindi freely without a trace of self-consciousness. Some even wrote Sanskrit. Hindus for their part, wrote in Persian. People spoke of each other as Turks or Rajputs but not as Hindus or Muslims. From the fifteenth century on however people began to think in terms of cultural differences on a credal basis. Cultural exchange continued unabated and so did the efforts to achieve an acceptable cultural synthesis.

**Caste is to a Hindu what nationality is to an Englishman.**

A Hindu may compromise on many matters connected with his religion but not on caste. Another inflexible point is the cow. A Hindu will not hesitate to throw his cherished non-violence to the winds, kill and be killed, in order to protect the cow. Muslims are equally adamant about certain things. They have a deadly fear of losing their Islamic identity. The Semitic equivalent of Aryavarta is Arabia. India lies on the periphery of the Islamic world, a country of outlanders, far from Arabia. Living in India does not give a Muslim the same sense of belonging that living in the Middle East does. This was the problem solved by partition in 1947, after defying solution for hundreds of years. Muslim identity is secure in Pakistan, as secure as it is in the Middle East. To live in Pakistan gives Indian Muslims a strong sense of belonging. They feel at home. They can, at last, be themselves. There is no longer need to take Hindus into consideration at every step.

The entire course of Indo-Muslim history was reversed by the attitude that led to the creation of Pakistan. It was a solution not even Aurangzeb would have conjured up in his imagination. Whatever else Aurangzeb may have been he was a good Indian. All of India's Muslim rulers knew the land belonged to both Hindus and Muslims and that these two religions had existed side by side for so many centuries they would have to continue to do so. Islamic identity could not be bought at the cost of Indian identity. Muslims, without losing their religious identity, were as good Indians as any.

Some Muslim aristocrats did not feel it necessary for a Muslim to have a purely religious identity. A Muslim could also have and did have a separate cultural identity, just as an Iranian had in Iran or a Turk in Turkey. A distinction was made between culture and faith for they realised it was easier to meet and make friends in cultural matters than in matters of religious practice. This policy succeeded beyond their wildest expectations. Hindus took to Persian ways on a large scale. Muslim aristocrats responded by patronising literature, art, drama and music. The Moguls encouraged intermarriage.

It is a matter of common knowledge that a person who changes his religion does not necessarily give up either his language or his culture. Bengalis who ceased to be Hindus continued to be Bengalis. Their Bengali identity is as dear to them as

their Muslim identity. They did not want to become Pakistanis at the cost of their Bengali identity. It was possible and desirable for them to keep both. This inevitably led to a conflict with the orthodox custodians of Islamic tradition in the Western half of Pakistan. West Pakistan was closer to the inner circle of the Muslim world and for that reason more assertive. The conflict was insoluble. A man cannot be a Muslim first and a Bengali first at one and the same time. The men who fought for Pakistan were Muslims first and last. They had no other loyalty. Culture to them meant Islamic culture. All else had to be purged away in the interests of purity.

There are many intermediate sects in India like the Auliyas and Bauls, the Kabirpanthis and the Lalanshahi Fakirs. These, taken together, constitute a bridge between the great religions. They are rejected by orthodoxy on both sides. The aristocrats tolerate or ignore them and the common people love them. They are heirs to a timeless religion which is independent of place. The songs and sayings attributed to them are a priceless part of the general culture of the people wherever they happen to be. In India they speak in the languages of India and are an essential and inalienable part of Indian culture. I cannot use the word 'Hindu' here for 'Hindu' no longer stands for Indian.

The word 'Indian' has likewise changed its content. It no longer stands for the entire subcontinent. The people of Bangladesh will demur if I say that the songs of Lalan Fakir are part of the Indian or Hindustani tradition. Yet Lalan lived and sang in an India that was undivided. The bi-centenary of his birth was celebrated in 1974 in both Bangladesh and West Bengal. He was a Baul. Bauls come from both Hindu and Muslim communities. Their beliefs and practices are drawn partly from the Sahajiya cult of Buddhism, partly from the Vaishnava doctrine of love and partly from the mystic teachings of the Sufis. Lalan belonged to a *sadhana* that traces its origins as far back as the Early Medieval Period at least. A unique feature is that men and women participate in it equally. The Bauls follow an obscure and precarious mode of life, living on what people give them in appreciation of their songs. These songs have a poignant and haunting beauty. Music is an important part of their religious practice and is

intensely spiritual. It is no more folk song than the Negro spirituals. In the words of their songs a spiritual tradition of great antiquity is preserved and cherished, couched in esoteric language the meaning of which is not always immediately apparent to the layman. But it is beautiful language with a distinct literary and poetic quality. A central tenet of their creed is belief in the Sahaj Manush or archetypal man who exists in all but has to be sought out and identified in oneself.

India was united under the Turks after six centuries of disunity but the Turks themselves broke into splinter groups before long. Independent Muslim kingdoms sprang up in Bengal, Malwa, Kashmir, Gujarat, and in the South. The Muslim rulers of Bengal were friendly with the Hindus. It was through their patronage that the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were translated into Bengali from Sanskrit. Other Sanskrit classics were also translated and Persian romance as well. Malik Mohammed Jayasi's *Padmavat* was among them. In it Padmini is the heroine and Alauddin the villain. It was translated by Alaol, a major poet. With two other Muslim Bengali poets, Magan Thakur and Daulat Kazi, he formed a trio at the court of the Buddhist prince of Arakan. They wrote mainly on Hindu subjects in language remarkably free from Arabic or Persian words. Such poets had it within their power to create a Persianised form of Bengali, parallel to Urdu. But they blazed the trail for successive generations of Bengali Muslim poets by eschewing that possibility. Twenty-four years of Pakistan failed to persuade the Muslim Bengalis either to accept Urdu or Persianised Bengali. The ultimate result is an independent Bangladesh, the residents of which are Bengalis to the core. The foundations of this cultural independence were laid by King Hussain Shah in the fifteenth century. Bengali literature has been on its own ever since and its development has been unencumbered by either Persian or Sanskrit.

At about this time all the literatures of India began to assert their own identities. A parallel development took place in Europe. Italian, French, Spanish and English began to assert themselves vis-a-vis Latin. The only difference is that these languages were speeded in their development by the European Renaissance. This did not happen in India. India's

Renaissance came much later. The printing press helped them greatly. They acquired prose. The writing of essays and novels followed. India had to wait until the nineteenth century for these things. Nevertheless a flowering did take place in the literatures of India during the Late Medieval Period. The dominant theme was the love of Radha and Krishna. The Radha of these poets was often modelled on poets own beloveds. Their Krishna was often themselves. They were prevented from speaking directly of their experience by social taboo. They could not do what Dante and Petrarch did. Subterfuge was necessary. The sole exception was Chandidas. To this day the story of Chandidas and Rami, the washerwoman, is celebrated in his songs. They are praised as an ideal pair of lovers. There was also the perennial theme of Rama and Sita, given a second lease of immortality by Tulsidas whose Ramayana was more popular than Valmiki's. Rama and Krishna were both divine heroes, incarnations of deity, and worshipped as such. There were many more minor figures in medieval Bengali, Hindi and Urdu literature. In a class by itself was the Sant Sahitya, literature created by the Sants or Saints, like Kabir and Dadu, men who inhabited the highest reaches of the human spirit.

The two great popular religious movements of the day were *bhakti* and *sakti*. Literature, the visual and the performing arts, all reflected sacerdotal subjects. The Muslim rulers abhorred images so there was little sculpture. In the far South, however, where Hindus were in power, sculpture flourished. And in Bengal, under the patronage of the Pala dynasty, a distinctive style of sculpture developed. Much beautiful work was produced. But the absence of encouragement had its effect and decline inevitably set in. The earliest extant examples of Bengali poetry are the *charyapadas* of the same period. Assamese, Oriya, Hindi and Maithili all see the beginnings of their literatures in them. Dr. Shahidullah and other scholars have tried to distinguish regional variations in their composition. All these languages have a common Buddhist base. The Natha yogis also made an important contribution long before the Saktas and Vaishnavas took over and Sufism put in an appearance. The Bauls also are direct descendants of the poets of the *charyapadas*.

Medieval literature owed a great deal to the *sadhanas* or cults. Secular subjects were not entirely absent however and were derived chiefly from Persian romance, the Arabian Nights or Sanskrit love tales like that of Vidya Sundar. But stagnation set in and the same themes were repeated endlessly, showing a bankruptcy of resources. Sanskrit bogged down in the twelfth century. Bengali and other regional literatures followed suit in the eighteenth. The situation was little better in Arabia, Iran and Islamic countries. China and Japan were in a similar plight. It was only in Europe that there was much creative activity. This it owed to the Renaissance, the Reformation and the eighteenth century Enlightenment.

India did have a Renaissance also but it was of a different kind. Her Vaishnava poets were humanists. The human character of Radha took precedence over the divine character of Krishna. That was, of course, after the Sanskrit yoke had been broken. There was also a kind of Reformation, of which the Sikhs have been the most conspicuous example. They belong to a monotheistic, non-idolatrous sect that came in the wake of Islam. The Sikh example is not the only one of its kind but they are perhaps the most powerful.

Islam came to a dead end in the Late Medieval Period. Its early promise of social justice and democracy remained unrealised. The concentration of wealth and power in the upper ranks of society, combined with an out-of-date knowledge, was so nearly the same in both the inner and outer circles that Islam could not claim to have progressed much farther than the older civilisation of Hindustan. The Arabian-Iranian culture, brought with it by Islam, had lost its dynamism. Aristocratic Hindus were still devoted to it in a way but the charm was gone. For Indian noblemen it was an important bridge between their own country and the Middle East. Another link was Hindustani music. Astrology was another. Elephant riding and polo also made their contribution. These were common to almost all the regional cultures of the North and even the South shared them. India had, at that time, two dominant cultures : Indo-Aryan and Indo-Persian. Hindustani culture was a fusion of the two. Its most visible symbol is the Taj Mahal, the pride of Hindus and Muslims alike. There are countless monuments dear to both communities, mosques,

mausoleums etc. The arts and crafts introduced by the Turks and Moguls have permanently diversified and enriched the Indian heritage. I, for one, would not like to go back to the period when there were no Muslims in India.

The blended Indo-Aryan and Indo-Persian culture of the upper classes added a third stream to the already existing traditions, that of the orthodox Hindu on the one hand and, on the other, the Islamic current associated with the *madrasahs*. Traces of Greek philosophy and medicine were detectable in the instruction imparted at these institutions, elements the Arabs acquired from the Greeks and later passed on to the Europeans. During the first three centuries of Islam the Arabs contributed much to the advancement of knowledge. Then there was a setback : enlightenment gave place to conformism.

The central stream of Indian tradition continued to flow steadily forward. It had little to do with Greece, apart from astronomy and astrology, and even less to do with China or Persia. The seats of Sanskrit learning were dedicated to the task of preserving a culture that had not kept pace with the times and had not related itself to contemporary life. In the South, traditional dance forms and music and sculpture were well worth preserving with the care that was being given them for they had attained a perfection that could not be improved upon.

The Indian world was in some respects still medieval and in others still ancient while the European world had been modern for several centuries. A *madrasah* was medieval ; a *chatuspathi* ancient. The medieval and ancient existed side by side in India right up to the end of the eighteenth century. The Hindus were deeply attached to the ancient and the Muslims were no less deeply attached to the medieval. Each community gloried in the past but their pasts were not the same. They could not be. A Hindu-Muslim cultural unity was possible up to the point that has been described as Hindustani. Culture as distinguished from religion had few patrons outside the aristocracy. Culture as the handmaid of religion was given wide support; but culture in a secular sense had to wait until the nineteenth century for appreciation, although a beginning was made much earlier by the medieval nobles and knights.



The two words 'culture' and 'civilisation' were both coined in eighteenth-century Europe and given a modern connotation. In the nineteenth India took 'civilisation' and turned it into *sabhyata*. In the twentieth 'culture' was turned into *sanskriti*. Neither has yet been given its proper context in Indian languages. We still lean too heavily on religion and nationality to steer a cosmopolitan course between them. If, in a land of many religions, we identify 'civilisation' or 'culture' with religion 'Hindu' religious culture will be confronted with 'Muslim' religious culture. No reconciliation between the two will be possible because 'Muslim' has its heartland or inner circle in Arabia while 'Hindu' has its heartland or inner circle in Aryavarta, the Gangetic basin. Similarly, if we identify culture or civilisation with nationality, 'Hindu' defined as a nationality will of necessity exclude 'Muslim' defined as a nationality and confrontation between them will inevitably result in a secession of the Muslim-majority areas. That would have happened even if there were no third party involved.

In these lectures I have carefully avoided identifying the term 'Hindu' with either religion or nationality. It may have been possible to so identify it before the advent of the Turks and of Islam, but the diversity thereafter forces us to look for a unity transcending both religion and nationality. So the term 'Hindustani' was adopted and used to refer to both communities. The composite culture of Hindus and Muslims was 'Hindustani' culture. Their civilisation was likewise a 'Hindustani' civilisation.

'Culture' and 'civilisation' are not synonymous terms. There are thousands of tribes, each with its own culture. Civilisations are far fewer in number. It is perfectly correct to speak of Bengali or Punjabi culture but it would be presumptuous to speak of Bengali or Punjabi civilisation. The use of the term 'civilisation' is therefore restricted historically by a consensus among scholars. Greece was a smaller country than many parts of India or China. Yet everybody agrees that it had a great civilisation of its own. Crete is even smaller but it also is known to have had a unique civilisation. Any civilisation India can claim to have is on an all-India scale or in an Aryan or Dravidian context, or on the basis of territorial location in either the Indus valley or Ganges basin.

If the Early Medieval Period largely isolated India from the rest of the world, the Late Medieval Period ended this isolation at first through contacts with Arabia and Iran and Central Asia and then through contact with European countries by new sea routes. Fresh ideas, fresh speech, fresh blood and fresh religion poured into India invigorating and expanding the outlook of the people. It was a tremendous change after a comparatively long static period. There was excess just as there was excess in Europe during a parallel period. It was not long before this tendency to excess abated however out of consideration for the feelings of Hindu barons and merchants for these two classes became the pillars of the new regime. They accepted Persian culture to some extent even though they remained Hindus by religion. A dichotomy between religion and culture was thus created. Many Kayastha families of North India adopted Persian names which they retain to this day. They spoke Urdu and studied Persian in preference to Sanskrit. At the same time they observed caste rules and performed Hindu rituals just as blindly as before. Their womenfolk preserved the old traditions within their homes. Outwardly there may not have been any visible difference between a Hindu courtier and a Muslim one except that one wore cap and the other a turban. Even in independent India Hindu princes adopted Persian customs, dress and manners, accepting the general trend of the times. Many of them took pride in Persian or Arabic titles. In their harems Muslim eunuchs were employed to guard their Ranis. This practice persisted almost down to the present day. For Hindus and Muslims alike the Medieval Period was one of feudalism. Religion was of secondary importance. Power and wealth took precedence. These symbols of status may have been exotic. They were certainly exotic in the Modern Period. But manners were Persian before they became Westernised.

Hindu wives, entering a Muslim household, took with them numerous Hindu customs. Some of these wives were allowed to retain their own faith while others became converts. Belief in a Supreme Being was common to both the communities and both were fatalists. Whenever a miracle man appeared both Hindus and Muslims flocked to see him whether he was a pir or yogi. I have seen Hindus lighting candles at the tombs of

Muslim holy men and Brahmans acting as caretakers of the holy footprints of the Prophet. The Hindu festival of Holi was celebrated by the Muslim rulers of Delhi. Many aristocratic Muslim families adopted Hindu marriage customs. Converts continued to observe them after their change of religion just as before. In the romance of Hir and Ranjha both the hero and the heroine are Muslims. Their tragedy is brought about by caste and family pride just as if they were Hindus. The concord between Hindus and Muslims, so alike in so many ways, was interrupted by brief spells of frenzy periodically, however. What exasperates all efforts to bring them together in one great nation is that the Muslims, although racially and culturally long since inseparable from Hindus, still ally themselves with the external Islamic world, cutting across geographical and national frontiers. The Hindu has no extra-territorial affiliations. The old affinities of the Early Medieval Period are forgotten. All feeling of oneness with Indo-China and Indonesia lapsed. The memory of the Muslims was kept fresh and strong by daily contacts with Mecca where Indian pilgrims met and still meet co-religionists from Morocco and Java. Medieval European history tells many tales of Catholic-Protestant bloodshed. These are without a parallel in Medieval India. Knowing this I assumed the worst was over for us. That was a mistake. The worst was yet to come. The insane fury that broke out in the middle of the twentieth century had been held in abeyance by history for centuries. A great nation went down in an unprecedented flood of furious hatred. The Indus valley and the Gangetic-Brahmaputra delta were lost to the Hindus. Muslims lost Delhi, Agra and Lucknow.

It was a dismal ending to the long efforts to effect a workable synthesis between the two great religious communities. For a thousand years Indian history had been at work on the problem, trying various solutions. There were those who believed it had been achieved and looked upon it as a settled fact of Indian life. To them this terrible outbreak of insanity came as a great blow.

Yet the same thing might have happened in reverse if the Hindus had been in a minority in India and maintained extra-territorial loyalties through contact with the Buddhist world of, say, Kyoto as their Mecca. They too may have felt the need

for a homeland of their own and feel prepared to sacrifice regions traditionally regarded as impure in order to obtain it. The obsession with ritual purity and their fear of pollution is a weakness of the Hindu mental make-up that could have proved fatal long ago and still may. Ironically the Muslims also became addicted to purity in their turn. Pakistan is the 'land of the pure'. Thus it was that regions regarded by the Aryans as polluted and impure became holy in the eyes of the Muslims. For them the impure became pure. And areas considered pure by the Aryans were looked upon as defiled.

If different sections of the population of a country shun contact with each for fear of mutual pollution it is difficult for them to look upon themselves as a single nation. Even the Catholics and Protestants of Europe, rabid as they have been in their antagonism, have never regarded each other as defiled. No power on earth can unite people if they loathe each other to the extent of shunning all contact, even the most casual physical touch. All art and music and literature and general culture is of no avail, no matter how many centuries have gone into its making. Men of my idealistic temperament will continue to dream of a day when a synthesis between 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' will become the reality we hoped to make it but I do not know how it can come about as long as extra-territorial loyalties persist and majority-minority apprehensions are not allayed.

The Hindus of the Medieval Period had no quarrel with those who believed in an only God and thought of the Godhead as Formless. There were many among them who held the same beliefs. They did not, of course, approve of the smashing of idols and the destruction of temples but this phase did not really last long. The killing of cows remained a sore point with Hindus for it hurt their deepest-rooted sensibilities. But even this did not alienate them as the Buddhist denial of the authority of the Vedas and Brahmans did. The Buddhists came to be regarded as aliens by their own kinfolk. If the aversion to *Mlechchhas* and *Yavanas* still extant among orthodox Hindus is added we shall see that there was and perhaps is sufficient ground for a conflict that cannot be resolved. Yet a composite culture developed in spite of all these disruptive forces. Friendly fellow-feeling did and does exist.

The crux of the Hindu-Muslim problem was the domination

of one community by the other. One was weaker for five hundred years, subdued by the superior unity and military prowess of the Turks and Moguls. British rule established equality by rendering both communities equally weak. For two hundred years this situation prevailed, The psychology of the bully and the coward persisted. Cowardice, as Gandhi said, is double-distilled violence. The pent-up fury broke out in 1946, forcing a decision to partition India, Bengal and the Punjab in 1947 when the British withdrew.

This was not the fulfilment natural to Indian history or destined by it. That fulfilment was contained in a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim, thesis and anti-thesis, a composite and variegated heritage of great richness and diversity within which all differences are resolved and each community finds its normal place. Our ideal of a synthesis is that both Hindu and Muslim become Indian. A Hindu would cease to be only a Hindu and Muslim would cease to be only a Muslim. All that was best in both traditions would be included in the term 'Indian'. This would not necessarily mean that they would not have separate forms or places of worship or follow separate scriptures or spiritual guides. What really matters is an indivisible national consciousness such as the Japanese have. We fondly believed that Indian nationalism was no less strong than Japanese nationalism. We laid the blame for our lack of unity at the door of the British policy of Divide and Rule. But, as I survey Hindu-Muslim relations from their beginning to the present, I find it difficult to see in them any great resemblance to Shinto-Buddhist relations in Japan. I also find that no synthesis worth the name was reached between Buddhists and Hindus although they lived side by side for a far longer period than Hindus and Muslims. I remember Maulana Shaukat Ali warning the Muslims that they might meet with the same fate as the Buddhists if they trusted the Hindus. This was a warning to Hindus as well. Their fate might not have been dissimilar if they had agreed to live in Pakistan. At that time no one foresaw the partition of the country. Now India and Pakistan represent a thesis and anti-thesis and we have to think of a synthesis all over again, a synthesis that can be achieved some day and include within it Bangladesh.

## THE MODERN PERIOD

India was a divided country when the British won the battle of Plassey and made Calcutta their capital. Little by little they moved inland from Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. All three of these places are situated on the sea coast. The entire sub-continent came under their domination. They failed to conquer Afganistan, and they stopped short of annexing Nepal. But they took Burma, incorporating it in their Indian Empire. This was an anomaly. There were other similar anomalies.

The various East India Companies that came to India in the first instance to trade also traded with Malaya, Indonesia, Indo-China and China. In their eyes India was only a part of East India, better known as Hindustan. Gradually the Companies added conquest to their activities. Each acquired an Empire. One was British India. Another French India. There was also a Dutch India and Portugese India. British India did not take over the various kingdoms known as the princely states directly but the rulers acknowledged British paramountcy. The British sovereign was represented by a Viceroy whose authority extended to both parts of India, the Indian states as well as the territory known as British India. This unity was not established in a day. It took a long time to achieve. When it became an accomplished fact it was accepted by the Indian people as a natural and normal state of affairs. Indian nationalists took it for granted and denied the British credit for it. To them also it seemed a fact of nature. They looked upon the British as profit-motivated

capitalists and imperialists whose object was exploitation. There was much more to it than that. Great cities grew up. Calcutta, Bombay and Madras became centres of a metropolitan culture that included the new, modern, Western culture. The man who was the first to welcome this development was Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He personally defied the ban on travel by sea, sailed to Europe and acquainted himself with English and continental culture at first hand. He was agreeably surprised to find that several of his books had preceded him and his work was known. It is symbolic that his tomb has become a place of pilgrimage for all Indians who venture abroad for he died in England.

Ram Mohan Roy was a man of religion. He was also a patriot. Yet culture was, for him, independent of both creed and politics. Culture, he felt, should be as modern as the age, on a par with the culture of other countries and, of necessity, cosmopolitan. He himself received his education in the time-honoured traditional institutions of both the Hindus and Muslims. In the absence of a western educational institution he studied English privately. He was fluent in both Persian and Sanskrit as well as Bengali. As the upshot of his experience he advocated a new system of education for India. The subjects he wanted to see on the curriculum were the subjects being taught in contemporary European schools, not those studied in the *madrasahs* and *chatuspathis*. This change was as epoch-making as the change that was wrought in Europe three centuries earlier by the Renaissance, the change from the old learning to the new.

The East India Company, however, did not feel that Ram Mohan Roy's new system was either desirable or necessary. India was an oriental country. It should remain oriental. There were European scholars, deeply learned, who apprehended that the introduction of new-fangled western notions into India would have a deleterious effect. These scholars were orientalist with an enlightened appreciation of and respect for traditional Hindu and Muslim teaching. In Europe itself the debate between those who favoured a classical education and insisted upon its superiority and those who were trying to introduce science subjects and scientific methods into the schools was far from over. Sanskrit has affinities with

Greek and Latin. For this and other reasons there was a tendency to assume that the classical pattern of education in India was the same, or nearly the same, as the European. To them Ram Mohan Roy appeared exotic. They did not regard him as representative of his country's intellectual life. In India, however, a section of public opinion was on his side. The urban middle classes in Bengal, Hindus for the most part, were expanding rapidly and the inadequacy of the old system of education in the new circumstances was a matter of daily experience for them. They supported the demand for a new type of school on a modern, western model.

When the Hindu College was founded in Calcutta a number of Europeans were impressed. They began to see Ram Mohan Roy's point and to agree with him. Macaulay, by his famous Minute, made it the Government's policy to give encouragement to education on the English model in preference to the traditional Hindu and Muslim schools. Ram Mohan Roy won a posthumous victory. He had not suggested the abolition of the traditional subjects nor did he desire it. On the contrary, he had envisaged a Vedanta College. What he really wanted was that the people of India should have access to the knowledge being imparted to people of Western countries. They had a right to it. That this new knowledge had its uses was self-evident. It was intended to bring our people into line with the more advanced countries and to revise their sense of reality. The world in which they had been living so long had become unreal, having lost touch with actuality. They were three hundred years behind the times and seven thousand miles from the main currents of progress. Men like Ram Mohan Roy strove to diminish the distance both in time and space. They were not primarily interested in equipping middle class Bengali young men with qualifications that would land them jobs in the British establishment although clerks with a working knowledge of English were in great demand. Not did the promoters of the new education intend to widen the gap between the educated and uneducated classes. The gap was already there. The uneducated did not know Persian and even those who could read a little Bengali had no access to books. Books did not become available until the printing press made them so. Libraries did not appear until much later. The sudras, in the earlier periods of



our history, were forbidden to hear a word of Sanskrit. It was an offence for them to listen. The gap between the Sanskrit-speaking Brahmans and the lower classes was enormous. English did not create a new division. It has never been an offence for anybody belonging to any caste to listen to English being spoken.

The cultural scene in India underwent rapid change. A new generation rose, a generation which was educated in western ways and equipped with a knowledge of Science and scientific method. The printing press accelerated the pace. Its effects were in evidence everywhere. Newspapers, journals, magazines, books poured in a steady stream into the public life of the country. A critical mentality developed. Everything was scrutinised by the light of reason. Public orations reflected the change.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, of Portugese extraction, was an inspiring teacher. Many of the young men who later became leaders were his students. Their lack of veneration for the merely old and time-honoured offended the traditionalists. What was, on the surface, a confrontation between Oriental and Occidental was actually a domestic confrontation between the old and the new. The intellectuals of India had done no original thinking for at least a thousand years. Their instructors were gurus to them, the relationship between teacher and taught being one of unquestioning trust and blind devotion. Authority had never before been questioned. It was unthinkable that a group of youngsters should have the audacity to challenge a learning and way of life that had stood the test of centuries. The rishis had handed it down to successive generations from their forest schools. The inexplicable impertinence of these young men was blamed on the new education, a *mlechchha* education.

This new generation was regarded as alien in culture if not in blood. The young men were *feringhis*. The difficulty of their getting a hearing was complicated by the presence of the missionaries. The missionaries were critical of things Hindu and their attitude disturbed the traditionalists. They suspected the Derozians were halfway to Christianity and would soon begin to leave the Hindu fold. They did not know and could not be expected to know that an Age of Reason had set in or

that the eighteenth century Enlightenment was in any way different from the preceding Age of Faith. The Derozians were rationalists. They did not believe in an infallible religion. But missionary influence was strong for many reasons and some eminent Hindus did become Christian converts. The old guard of Hindu society felt that their fears were justified. Many features of liberal Christian practice and belief were incorporated in the constitution of the Brahmo Samaj, a religious body founded upon the teachings of the Upanishads by Ram Mohan Roy. It formed a kind of bridge between Hinduism and Christianity, uniting the best features of both. The Brahmo Samaj became a kind of Church, not unlike the Unitarian sect. Those for whom Christianity had a strong attraction found all they needed in it. Vedic and Brahmanic authority also gave place to the authority of the Upanishads.

The main body of the English-educated Indians remained inside the Hindu fold, acting as a leaven from within. The mythological approach to life was slowly replaced by a critical, scientific and historical attitude. Theology was separated from philosophy and Western philosophy was given precedence over Eastern even at the Calcutta Sanskrit College. Vidyasagar himself insisted upon it. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was deeply influenced by Comte, the great French philosopher.

The Hindus did not doubt that theirs was the oldest and the best of cultures but they were less confident than formerly of their power to subdue their conquerors through it. The Muslim Arabs and Turks and Moguls had not succumbed. On the contrary, the appeal of the ancient and traditional had no hold over them; they resisted it with complete success. The Hindus developed a defensive attitude in the centuries following their appearance on the Indian scene. They sought a way to live and let live on mutually acceptable terms. An alien creed and a different culture alarmed them instinctively. There were some, however, who became familiar enough with Arabian-Persian culture to be able to distinguish it from Islam. They admired it and adopted many features of the elegant and beautiful Persian way of life, making it their own. To these connoisseurs the new culture of the West presented no difficul

ties. With gracious urbanity and a polished sophistication they were able to accomodate it without jarring incongruities. Europeans, in their turn, yielded to their environment and Persianised their ways to a great extent. Yet people of this kind were feared by the orthodox Hindus almost as much as Christian missionaries. They were regarded as equally impure and dangerous.

The Hindus had known the Arabs and Turks before the rise of Islam. When, inspired by the proselytizing zeal of their new faith, the Arabs and Turks appeared in the role of invaders, former acquaintance stood both parties in good stead. They shared attitudes that belonged to their period of history such as the feudal mentality. The same was not the case with the newcomers from England and France. The people from these countries were utter strangers for there had been no previous contact. They did not belong to the same period of history nor did they share common attitudes. Both the British and the French were two or three centuries ahead of the Hindus and Muslims. They belonged to the modern age and feudalism was a long-discarded phenomenon. The Industrial Revolution had begun; and the French Revolution with its revolutionary aftermath, had taken place. The English and the French were concerned with capitalism. A policy of live and let live was possible for the Hindus with the Turks and Arabs for their ways of thinking were not radically different but with the English and French it was another proposition altogether. Threats to religious belief were nothing new but threats to established social order could not be lightly dismissed. Science and technology were entirely outside the range of traditional Hindu thought. Traditionalists could not understand them and few made any effort to do so. The changes that were coming were far-reaching in their social consequences and not at all reassuring.

The Hindus were therefore divided as never before. In Russia, where Western European culture prevailed among the elite, there were Westernisers and Russophils. In India there were Westernisers and Indophils. The Muslims were in a separate category. They detested Christianity with a passion left over from the Crusades. They hated the *feringhis* for having, as they believed, deprived them of their empire by

trickery. They still dreamed of a day when Allah would restore the throne of India to its rightful owner. Of what use would an English education be to them? They clung to their *madrasah* without any qualms. English classes were introduced into the Calcutta *Madrasah* but few students were attracted to them. Modernism was just as incomprehensible to the Muslims as it was to traditionalist Hindus. They regarded it with alarm. It was a menace to their social order.

The British rulers and their Hindu and Muslim subjects formed a triangle. The Hindus were grateful to the British for not putting them under Muslim authority. They were freed from an irksome subjection. The Muslims were wholly unreconciled. They resented having lost their supremacy and they resented having a Hindu put in higher positions, second only to the British who, of course, occupied the top posts. This triangular configuration could not be broken unless India's former rulers formed an alliance with the Marathas and Sikhs and drove the *feringhis* into the sea. Another alternative would have been to invite Islamic powers like Turkey, Iran and Afganistan to do this for them. A Pan-Islamic solution appealed to orthodox Muslims more than a Pan-Indian one. To liberal Muslims the Pan-Indian alternative made better sense. They wished to live in amity with the Hindus and participate in a common culture.

The installation of Queen Victoria as the Empress of India and the deportation of the last Mogul emperor marked a turning point in Indian history. It ruled out for all time any possibility of a Muslim restoration. The Pan-Islamic brotherhood continued to dream of the glorious days of the Arab conquest of Spain and the Turkish conquest of the Balkans, hoping against hope for a grand alliance that would defeat Britain on every front. The more realistic and far-sighted leaders rejected the idea however. They also rejected the idea of a powerful alliance between Muslims and Hindus that might ultimately lead to a joint victory. Their attitude to the British was changed. They now regarded them as friends and patrons if not equals. This was a volte-face that was to lead inexorably to separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims, separate quotas in the public services and ultimately to a separate Muslim state. By the withdrawal of the British the triangle was broken into two.

parallel lines. The two lines, India and Pakistan, may or may not meet in infinity.

There were differences between Hinduism and Islam no doubt but it had never occurred to anybody that these differences would lead to a complete separation, a division into water-tight compartments inevitably accompanied by an unofficial exchange of population on a tragic scale. The secular policy of the Indian leaders was the only ameliorating factor in this exchange, preventing an even greater holocaust than that which took place. The British connection was the only link that remained between the two separated territorial units. Both India and Pakistan stayed in the Commonwealth. Yet the British presence was constantly decried as a wedge driving Hindus and Muslims further and further apart, in order better to subdue them both. Cultural ties were broken also and the only link that remained was English. India chose Hindi. Pakistan chose Urdu. The two communities had not been so hostile to each other since the twelfth century. Eight hundred years of a common development was forgotten for the moment. To all appearances the continuous and unremitting efforts of well-wishers on both sides to achieve a viable synthesis had failed.

The modern period of Indian history is a time of conflict and reconciliation between East and West, old and new. Never before had India been ruled from a base outside its territory. Never before had Indians been subject to the authority of a less-than-sovereign government in India. The British Government in India was subordinate to a superior Government in England that was directly responsible to the British electorate, not to the Indian people. Never before had Indian interests been subsidiary to those of a foreign power. The needs of British capitalists and industrialists were given priority. Never before had Indian soldiers been forced to fight people with whom they had no quarrel. Never before had Indian labour been sent as indentured labour to work on plantations in foreign lands and been treated as inferiors. In his own country the tallest Indian was humiliated with impunity by the lowliest Tommy.

On the positive side India was united for the first time from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and from Baluchistan to Burma.

The unity was real. A railway system was laid out that enabled a man to travel from Peshawar to Dibrugarh without a passport, without a change of currency, and without customs formalities. Goods moved without let or hindrance over the whole surface of the land. Post and telegraph services facilitated and speeded up communication between far-flung and hitherto isolated areas. Books began to circulate in the mails. Ideas travelled faster than people. The Punjabis and Bengalis, the Marathas and Malayalis found themselves thinking the same thoughts. And same feelings stirred in their hearts to an extent that never before happened in history. The same laws applied to all and were administered through a network of law courts to appeal to. The administrative system was the same everywhere with a few local modifications in the princely States. Internecine wars came to an end. There were no more invasions. Pax Britannica saw to that. Newspapers voiced the grievances of the people. The people were unified as never before. Unifying also was the experience of standing on platforms and giving voice to discontent. Associations of many kinds were freely formed and permitted to function without hindrance, even the Indian National Congress. Constitutional changes were suggested, fought for, and granted.

Careers were opened to the middle classes that had never existed before. The middle class itself was a product of British rule. It began to prosper. By a dialectical process thesis created antithesis. Indian nationalism was generated by British imperialism. Indian nationalists wanted to replace their rulers but they did not want to do away with British institutions. These they wished to retain, all of them, the administrative, judicial and legislative. An Indian city on Indian soil should be the capital instead of London. Moderates and extremists differed not over ends but over means. What means were to be used to achieve those ends? This was the picture before the First World War. India had telescoped into a single century three major European transformations, passing through a Renaissance, a Reformation and an Enlightenment.

When World War I broke out there were only two parties that did not rally around the British Crown. Pan-Islamists saw in the possibility of a Turkish victory the revival of their dream. And those nationalists who believed in terrorist methods sought

assistance from the enemy, expecting Germany to help them achieve their objective.

During the Mogul era the Banias had a large share in the wealth of the country and the Rajputs enjoyed a large measure of power also. Indian princes and large landowners or zemindars enjoyed a large measure of power under the British Raj and Banias retained a considerable share of the wealth. The ascendancy therefore was not altogether White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. It was also Hindu Muslim Bourgeois Feudal. In times of trouble the latter made common cause with the former and all differences were forgotten.

After the War a change took place which was comparable to that ushered in by the introduction of Western education. It was as subtle and as far-reaching. In the course of fighting Germany Indian soldiers overcame any sense of inferiority they might have had. They could not be expected to display the same degree of servility as before. Demobilised army men were among the agitators who protested against the Rowlatt Act. Unfortunately men like Dyer and O'Dwyer had learnt nothing. They resorted to repressive measures harsh in the extreme. In 1919 India was seething with discontent, a veritable volcano. The British bureaucracy however showed no signs of regarding India as anything but a permanent dependency. The press and the Bar, both of which had fostered the political advancement of the people with a fair degree of freedom, giving voice to grievances and advocating remedies, sharpened their criticism by degrees, moving steadily towards an extreme position. Two of the new professions, the Law and Journalism, attracted men who were of an independent turn of mind and were capable of giving the country leadership. They favoured parliamentary institutions and when they had these, looked beyond to their logical extension in a cabinet responsible to the parliament not immediately, of course, but as soon as feasible after the War. It was at this point that the unrest seething below the surface erupted at Amritsar. Civil Disobedience became unavoidable.

Gandhi took the initiative. The nation had to be mobilised to fight a war, a non-violent war. The initiative remained in his hands until the withdrawal of the British in 1947. The Indians became a fighting people, something they had never been before.

in history. The common people had always been passive, leaving the fighting to the military castes. Wars had been conducted by professionals according to a professional code, in a prescribed style. The sole exception had been the Sikhs who fought as a single body under the leadership of their gurus. Gandhi conjured up mass civil disobedience, a technique without precedent in the annals of war. He drew upon the ethical teachings of the Buddha and of Mahavira as well as other great spiritual teachers in his efforts to give shape to a new political order, an order with a moral code. This too, was something that had never been done before. He was hailed as a Mahatma both in India and the West. A man of his stature could not remain content with political objectives only and he placed before his countrymen a new set of goals, suggesting a new set of institutions to achieve them. His call to purge Indian society of age-old abuses to make the country fit for independence appealed to the sense of purity and the aversion to ritual pollution which characterised both Hindus and Muslims. The response was phenomenal.

Novel also was the attitude he took up in regard to the industrialisation of India. He insisted that science, no matter how wonderful, must be kept in check by ethical considerations. This could be done, he said, only by developing decentralised civilisation and by limiting the size and scope of industrial projects. He wanted industry to be controlled by the workers. Capitalists should, he persuasively argued, act as trustees for the public good.

The initiative in cultural matters was retained by the westernised intelligentsia until the last decade of the nineteenth century. At that time the Indophiles brought forward their proposal for resisting the cultural subjection of India. By extolling all things Indian and ancient and denouncing all things foreign and modern they hoped to revive the glory that was India. Materialism was condemned and identified with the West; the spiritual tradition of India was exalted and identified with the East. This Revivalism applied to intellectual matters, arts and crafts and ways of living in general. The new learning and all that went with it was discredited. The Indian Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment were decried as materialistic and foreign-inspired. India, it was said, must go her own way



without imitating others. The only place she could go, in the circumstances, was to the past. The Vedic ashram ideal was vaunted. National schools were established. India was told to discover her own soul and live according to her own truth. The call was non-political but the response soon took on a political colouring. The Swadeshi Movement identified itself with the boycott of British goods. This was followed by the cult of the bomb. From start to finish the entire movement was Hindu. The British turned to the Muslims and began to favour them. A weapon far more powerful than the bomb was manufactured in the laboratories of the rulers : separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims. Hindus confronted Muslims in small electoral squares all over the country.

The Westernisers were liked by nobody, neither the revivalists nor the political activists nor the communalists. Did the British like them any better ? No, the British were not at all sure that India was ready for either freedom or democracy. They doubted whether an Indianised civil or military service could cope with the problems that were certain to arise. Nor did they think Indians equal to the task of developing technology and industrialisation wisely. The only visible alternative was reversion to oriental despotism. Short work would be made of Westernisers if that happened.

The Westernisers were on their way out before the Non-co-operation Movement began. The essential tenet of Indian nationalism was that India contained within herself all that she required, spiritual, intellectual, moral and material. Nothing need be imported from outside, not even science or technology. Even the sincerest nationalist demurred. He felt it would be sufficient for science and technology to be infused with the Vedanta spirit and a mystic element added to them. Science and technology had to be accepted and this formula satisfied India's self-respect. It also left some scope for co-operation with the West and some areas in which Western influence could act beneficially. The Westernisers were also modernisers and could not be rejected outright. They were not traitors to Indian nationalism. But Gandhi put them completely in the shade. Tagore protested against cultural non-cooperation. He invited the whole world to come and make its home in India. Sri Aurobindo did the same as he outgrew his early fiery nationa-

lism. And a religious organisation had been formed that spread all over the earth for the second time in India's history, carrying the spiritual message of a great saint, Sri Ramakrishna. The order founded in his name by Swami Vivekananda has established itself in the world at large as only the Buddhist Sangha succeeded in doing centuries earlier.

As for art, it was too late in the day to expect poets and artists to draw inspiration from Indian sources alone. Some artists who did do so initiated what is known as the Bengal School of Painting in the wake of the Swadeshi Movement. They did their best to revive the spirit of Ajanta and Ellora. When these efforts reached a dead end Jamini Roy turned to folk art and opened up a rich vein of vital and vigorous promise. Folk tradition could be taken advantage of only if artists went back to the village and lived there. Most of them felt a compulsion to live in cities. Their patrons were in the cities. Folk art produced in urban surrounding is like homespun khadi made in palaces.

Mahatma Gandhi was a man with a mission. He was the world's only specialist in Mass Civil Disobedience, a moral equivalent of war and revolution. He had a message for the World, all of it, not excluding the West. His quarrel was not with Westernism as such as with certain deleterious aspects of Modernism. He was not opposed to all things Western on principle. What he took exception to was criticised also by Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau. A democracy controlled by wealthy industrialists and militarists through mass communication media seemed to him to be a contradiction in terms. He opposed the proletarianisation of whole classes of skilled craftsmen and agriculturists; he opposed compulsory militarisation; he opposed large-scale industrialisation and urbanisation. He opposed the multiplication of material wants and the neglect of the starving spirit. Gandhi was one of the great rebels who regarded the British as the carriers of a deadly disease, a disease from which they themselves were suffering without knowing it and with which he did not want India to be infected. He wanted to protect India and at the same time cure England. He claimed to be the friend of both. He hoped to help both to maintain a healthy society by withdrawing co-operation from the forces which were the cause of a dangerous imbalance in the

metabolism of the state. He questioned the so-called benefits of British rule, including the railways and the law courts, hospitals, parliamentary institutions and the educational system, turning the tables on the modern West and those who saw only good in it. What he stood for was, actually, a new social order based on truth and non-violence. All that was conducive to health found a place in it. The roots of the Indian tree of life remained deeply buried in antiquity while new branches enriched the foliage of the times.

Few of his followers thought as he did. His Khilafatist allies certainly did not. The majority of the nationalists were revivalists and their gaze was fixed on the long and glorious past. They cast their eyes back to the Vedas. What they wanted was to revive this past, resuscitate Vaisya affluence, Kshatriya power and Brahman diplomacy. The Gandhian cult of non-violence, truth and brahmacharya had little real appeal for them. Moreover, they considered industrialisation a desirable way to get rich quick, militarisation a way to get strong quick, and parliamentary elections a way of gaining control of the government machinery, including the instruments of coercion like the police and jails.

The Khilafatists were still dreaming of the past glory of Islam. They wished to recapture their ancient eminence and extend it from the Atlantic to the Pacific. How could such a brave dream be realised without a modern army and large-scale industry? They did not believe in parliamentary democracy for in India the Muslims were a minority and would be at a disadvantage. They were, however, willing to give it a trial provide the Hindus agreed to a pact that would ensure equality of representation. They were more concerned over the fate of the holy places in the Middle East than of India's enslaved and impoverished millions. Gandhi's leadership was accepted because they needed a champion to defend the holy places. There were of course some who did share his concern for the poor and they also shared his non-violent and patriotic ideology. They were true Indophils. They remained with Gandhi after the Khilafatists took their departure, asking for no safeguards in the context of a free and independent India. The Khilafatists, in the course of their journey, finally arrived at a half-way house, somewhere between Pan-Islamism and Indian nationalism. This half-way

house was a Muslim homeland in the Indian subcontinent and to win it they were prepared to fight their old allies, the Hindus, rather than their old enemies the British.

A spirit of non-cooperation in the cultural field preceded Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement in the political. The Indophils stood for the boycott of Western education and for a scheme of national schools and colleges. This scheme made a concession to the times by accepting English as a subject but it was heavily encumbered with Sanskrit, Vedic practice and Puranic lore. At Varanasi the traditional learning went its traditional way. The spirit of the West was accommodated only superficially. In many other parts of the country, however, and particularly in Bengal, that spirit exercised considerable influence over literature. In Bengal an English-educated middle class elite cooperated with the English ruling class in all matters except religious. Because of this co-operative attitude Bengalis were able to spread out over Northern India and Burma. Everywhere they set up educational institutions, practised law and medicine and opened schools and colleges. Many were in Government service and some in journalism. Bengali influence in India was at its height towards the end of the nineteenth century. Their close contact with the British had an adverse effect also. British exclusiveness, arrogance and snobbery, the humiliating way they treated the 'Babus' gave rise to a hatred that was deep and deadly. The Babus turned against the Sahebs, terrorism was born. Thesis created antithesis.

Religious reformers like Keshub Chandra Sen arose, who felt no hesitation in adopting elements of both Christian and Islamic teaching. To translate the Qu'ran into Bengali was a daring thing to do. No Muslim would touch the translation but the Brahmos did. They read the Qu'ran as they read the Bible and the Upanishads. Some Brahmos studied Hebrew and Greek. The same catholicity was shown by the followers of Sri Ramakrishna who used both Christian and Muslim disciplines in the search for spiritual enlightenment. He summed up his conclusions by saying : The ways to God are as many as there are faiths. This was also the message of Theosophy which Madame Blavatsky gave to the world. The Theosophists made Adyar their international headquarters. Empires could come and empires could go. That Christianity and Islam should have

been brought to Indian soil to join the fraternity of great religions already existing there was looked upon as an act of God.

All men of culture who had thought about this problem felt the same way. If the Indo-Aryan roots were the deepest the Dravidian roots were the oldest. The Indo-Persian had a limited but nonetheless important appeal. It was not confined to the Muslims in the North and the Deccan. There were Hindus and Sikhs and Christians who both spoke and wrote Urdu. Hindustani music was and is common to all without distinction of caste or creed. In music it was no longer possible to revert to a purely classical Hindu idiom. The South tried to preserve the old and succeeded in a large measure but much diversification took place in the North. During the Modern Period diversification spread widely. Western influence was absorbed and made the basis of new variants. In the course of her long history India has assimilated many and diverse elements. One more did not make too much difference. The Tagores discarded all barriers, experimenting endlessly. Why should political status interfere with communication between people, or peoples, or place obstacles in the way of their understanding one another? The theme of Tagore's great novel *Gora* is the plight of a child whose Irish parents have died, leaving him to be brought up by Brahman foster parents. He was a *mlehcchha*. Would India take this orphan to her heart and make him her own or cast him out? Anandamayi, the foster mother, is prepared to forfeit her caste if need be rather than deny the child. Anandamayi symbolises Mother India to whom all children are her own, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, brown, white or yellow. Orthodox Hindu society rejected Gora but the Brahmo Samaj welcomed him. India accepts the West in the same way. Tagore composed an inspiring poem in which he calls India the 'shore of humanity, where all rivers flow into the sea,'. He goes on to say: 'Come, O Aryan, O Non-Aryan, O Hindu, O Mussalman, O Christian, O Englishman!' The poet invites them all to take part in the synthesis that is India. This poem was written long before Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize and India was accepted into the comity of the nations of the world as an equal. Twenty five years earlier, in 1885, the Indian National Congress adopted what this poem affirms as the truth by which it stood. The founder-secretary was Mr. A. O. Hume, a Scotsman, who

retired from the Indian Civil Service to devote his life to the cause of the Indian nation. Among the founder members of the Congress were Parsis, Anglicised Hindus and Muslims, lawyers and journalists, and some businessmen. All of them were loyal to the Crown and all of them were also patriotic Indians or friends of India. Lord Ripon, a former viceroy, speaking at Edinburgh, urged England to recognise and guide the Indian people in their efforts to establish their freedom of self-expression and natural development. He spoke of the justness of these aspirations and advised against resisting or ignoring the movement developing around them. The makers of free India did not design an exclusive nation. They were the architects of a country patterned as in Tagore's great poem, an inclusive country, a country that could and did take into its ample bosom Muslim and Englishman as well as Hindu.

Thus the culture of India is a comprehensive culture. In what language could all the diverse constituents converse? Sanskrit was not modern enough, nor was Persian. The only alternative was and is English. Without any encouragement Indians in every part of India have done and are doing a considerable amount of creative thinking and writing in English. Many of them, such as Sarojini Naidu or Aurobindo Ghose, were ardent nationalists. They had to write in English or not at all; they had no choice. Their subjects were Indian. European writers like Sister Nivedita, Sir Edwin Arnold and Annie Besant also wrote on Indian themes. The Indo-English literary tradition began to evolve as early as the time of Sir William Jones and Ram Mohan Roy, at the point of time when Western and Eastern minds met for the first tentative exchanges of thought and sentiment. Indologists have been communicating constantly ever since and English has been the medium through which they have made contacts and expressed their conclusions. There is no question of rejecting the many and great contributions that have been made to the Indian heritage on the grounds that they are contained in the English language. Halhed was the first to write a Bengali grammar. He wrote it in English in the eighteenth century. No Bengali grammar at all existed at that time, not even in Bengali. The Sanskritists did not even believe there was anything that could be called grammar in Bengali. They had scant regard for their own language. As a language

distinct from Sanskrit, with a character and beauty of its own, Bengali won recognition in the nineteenth century. The pliancy that was required to embody that Renaissance was found in it after persistent cultivation. It responded to the new ways of thinking and speaking with a flexible and nuanced richness that met the needs of the great thinkers of the Modern age and creative writing as well.

While Indians took to writing English, Europeans took to writing Indian languages. Christian missionaries were the first to articulate these languages in a modern context. The growth of Bengali prose has been traced to Portuguese initiative. Englishmen developed it further and their example was followed by pandits and munshis. The pandits often overloaded Bengali with Sanskrit baggage and the munshis often overloaded it with Persian baggage. The English-educated gentry tried their hand at writing Bengali too and adopted it to English models. They looked to English or French for essay forms, the novel and the short story. For lyric and epic poetry they continued to turn to Sanskrit and Medieval Bengali but finally settled for English. Sanskrit drama gave place to Shakespearean and contemporary English. Even the great Sanskrit scholar Vidyasagar, the father of Bengali prose, was seen translating Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*. The first Bengali play was performed under the direction of a Russian on a European-type stage towards the close of the eighteenth century. The European community in Calcutta had their own theatre. It interested the Bengali elite so much the Bengali theatre of the nineteenth century was modelled on it but, as it catered to a Bengali audience, it developed in its own way, acquiring a distinct character that persists to this day. The tendency to Sanskritise remained and resulted in the creation of a stilted and artificial style known as 'high' or *sadhu bhasa* or polite speech. Colloquial speech was introduced into literature slowly, at first in the drama and later in the dialogue of novels and short stories. The speech of the people has now become standard for creative writing, yet Sanskrit is still drawn upon when a difficult thought requires precise expression. And in such cases Sanskrit is given preference over English. The first Bengali novel was written for Bengali Christian women by a certain Mrs Mullens. The first Bengali journals were published by Christian missionaries. After the Mutiny in 1857, however,

European literary activity in Bengal ceased.

The Mutiny, it seems, came as a deep shock to all classes of Europeans : public servants, businessmen, missionaries. They became apprehensive lest another, similar outbreak occur without warning. Elaborate arrangements were made for the protection of the lives and honour of Europeans. The policy of Divide and Rule was deliberately adopted and conscientiously applied. All Indians who had anything to do with Europeans were hurt by the sudden coolness in a hitherto warm relationship. Converts were in a dilemma. If they aligned themselves with the Europeans their Indian compatriots looked askance at them. They lost status. They were mistrusted. If, on the other hand, they held themselves aloof from the European community they lost contact with the only people upon whom they could rely. Ties with their Indian kinsmen were broken by the act of their changing faith. They became isolated. Culturally they continued to be Indian and their fate was finally decided by that fact.

The relationship between Indians and Europeans became perfunctory and formal after the Mutiny. Indians who travelled abroad found a welcome contrast in the way they were received. They developed a preference for European civilisation and culture but British clubs in India remained closed to them no matter how high their rank or how wealthy they might be. How could there be any meeting of minds in such an oppressive atmosphere ?

Westernised Indians lost what little voice they had had. Their detractors quoted Kipling: "O East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." Ironically they agreed with him. Those who believed in the possibility of an East-West synthesis as an ideal were out of favour. Tagore went bravely ahead with his plans to provide a place and an atmosphere where the best could meet the best freely, without fear or favour. Santiniketan was and is such a place although by creating it he exposed himself to the suspicion of narrow-minded parochialist nationalism. His own people doubted him and so did the foreign rulers.

Then the Muslims began to look upon the nationalists with doubt in their eyes. In their struggle for freedom hundreds and thousands of Indians had found inspiration and courage in



Bankim Chandra's famous anthem, *Bande Mataram*, "Motherland, to thee we bow." This song was now discovered to be offensive to Muslims in the Congress camp. Ultimately it was replaced by Tagore's *Jana gana mana adhinayaka* "Thou art the ruler of the hearts and minds of all the people". This song, celebrating the unity of Hindu and Muslim. East and West, became India's national anthem. India, in the greatness of her vision and the wide sweep of her loving embrace, accepted all comers

Yet it failed to win over the separatist Muslims. They did not want to lose their identity as Muslims, as an identity which cut across frontiers and made them a part of the Islamic fraternity over which the Caliph presided. They did not want to merge themselves with Indian nationalism to the exclusion of what they regarded as a higher loyalty. Had they not fought for the Khilafat ? Like the British they were in India but not of India.

Jinnah and his Muslim League followers decided to quit India at the same time as the British. Thus the country broke apart. India surrendered her unity for the sake of her freedom. The Indo-British question was solved, to everybody's relief. The Hindu-Muslim question still defied solution and nobody was satisfied, It looked as if a thousand years of sharing of homeland and living side by side had gone in vain. The Hindustani culture of which I have spoken had the ground cut away from under its feet. The same thing happened to both the Bengali and the Punjabi cultures. After 1947 there was no common ground between the Hindus and the Muslims who had shared Hindustani culture. Gandhi gave his life in the effort to subdue the frenzy that swept over the country. His funeral was held on the day the last British soldier left India's shores. The departure of the British was the measure of the Mahatma's success in the application of his Non-violent methods. He had aimed at a change of heart in the British, not their defeat. The people of England showed their good will. So did their Parliament, their Government and their Viceroy.

Those who dedicated their lives to the effort to achieve Indian Independence little knew that freedom, when it came, would undo the work of two centuries of sustained effort by the people of two countries, two continents and two historical back-

grounds. The Indians belonged to the Medieval Period and the British to the Modern. India reverted to disunity, in spite of the co-operative spirit which had presided over its development in a manner unique in the history of the world. Two centuries are a brief period in a history covering fifty centuries. The good accomplished outweighs the harm done. While the struggle for freedom lasted the dust of battle often blinded us to this fact.

A new dimension was now added to the battle. Tagore never said, 'Come, O Marxists ! O Proletarians !' But they came. Some came from outside the country. Others came from within, from below. Many of the terrorists who had been forced to flee the country and were seeking arms and allies abroad came back Communists. They dreamed of staging a revolution on the Russian model. Books and pamphlets poured into the country. These were more dangerous than arms. The heads of the younger generation were filled with social revolutionary ideas.

The literature their writers produced was subversive to a degree. It aimed not only at undermining the state but society as well. The Indian social order was shared by Hindus, Muslims and Europeans. Gandhi did not favour class war. He laboured to the last day of his life to build and strengthen a non-exploitative society. His followers were committed to a democratic form of socialism, a controlled measure of industrialisation and a modicum of military defence. By these means Gandhi hoped to eliminate the iniquities of the social set-up and of unjust caste and class discrimination. He went farther than his followers in his advocacy of non-violence and would have chosen death for himself rather than death for an enemy. His ideal state was a state without an army and he recommended mass civil disobedience as the best means of defence. Living on the produce of one's own hands, self-reliant and self-contented labour, went with it. He believed in manual work.

In a country like India, criss-crossed with divisions, vertical and horizontal, it can never be an easy task to rise above casteism, communalism and regionalism. It is not easy for the individual nor is it easy to persuade others of the necessity. These things have been with us since ancient times. They are so deeply embodied in the mental make-up of the people sus-

tained and unremitting effort to alter them must be kept up for a long time yet. We are no longer under foreign rule. Our government is our own. Our laws are our own. The administration of justice is also in our hands. How gratifying that is ! Yet we are not at peace either inside our frontiers or outside them. Peace has yet to come. We have not won it. The problem of Pakistan is still with us : Pakistan to the West and Bangladesh to the East. For a nation to split apart as India and later as Pakistan has done is not unprecedented in history. The Holy Roman Empire of the German nation was at first under a hereditary Emperor, then under an Emperor elected by autonomous Catholic and Protestant princes and prelates. Finally it split into Protestant-majority Germany and Catholic-majority Austria. At an earlier stage Protestant-majority Switzerland broke away. At a later stage West Germany became separate from East Germany. The grounds were ideological. Pakistan and Bangladesh separated for linguistic reasons.

Although divided the Germans have a common culture that still distinguishes them from others in the world. All who possess it are identifiable as Germans. In cultural matters there is still so much we have in common as inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent it cannot but be to our mutual advantage to be given the opportunity to welcome poets, singers, dancers, instrumentalists and artists from Pakistan and Bangladesh. We shall surely welcome the opportunity to send our cultural ambassadors to those countries also. A sense of the unity in diversity we still share can be revived in this way and our consciousness of a common heritage re-invigorated.

Political division does not mean cultural division. The cultural heritage of all three independent nations on this sub-continent, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan is still undivided. Fundamentally it is indivisible. Culture, as I have said, is independent of religion and nationality. The culture we speak of as 'Hindu' is the culture of a geographical area known in history variously as Hind, Hindustan and India. Now that it has been divided into three political units no single word can be used to describe the culture of all three. One or the other is sure to take offence. I, therefore, make bold to suggest a term of my own coinage, Indo-Pak-Bangla. It includes

'Hindu', 'Hindustani' and 'Indian.' The new name will ensure the continuity of the composite culture of this sub-continent in each of its several parts.

Let it be clearly understood that our cultural heritage is indivisible and that it includes the legacy of the West also even though the British Raj is no more. It is not possible to eliminate this legacy from our heritage any more than it is possible to efface what the Turks and Moguls contributed to it also. A politically inglorious period can be a culturally glorious one. Our cultural heritage has been diversified and enormously enriched by peoples of all races and religions and languages, Eastern and Western. It may be that we have been enslaved politically, emasculated militarily, and ruined economically but it cannot be said we have suffered a setback culturally. Left to themselves none of the literatures of India would have become as great or greater than they have as a result of the additional waters of the many cultural streams that have poured into the riverbed of the mighty Ganga on its way to the sea.

Conflict is often conducive to growth, sometimes essential to it. Contacts cannot be dispensed with without impoverishment. The old diehard policy of avoiding contacts, to evade confrontations that might result in conflict, resulted in a barrenness on the eve of the Turkish invasion. It came again on the eve of the British conquest. The only way to overcome this sterility was through cross-fertilisation. If India had not withdrawn into her shell in the Early Medieval Period but gone out to meet the new world of Islam boldly it would have certainly been much better for all of us. It would have been better if she had gone out to meet the new world of the European Enlightenment in the Late Medieval Period. By doing so the humiliating situation which followed in both cases might have been avoided. But that would have required the discarding of inhibitions concerning *jati* and *varna* that had enslaved the Hindus even more surely than any alien rule and emasculated the bulk of them. And the Muslim likewise lived in a prison of the mind into which no light from the world of advancing knowledge penetrated. To him the Quran was the last word, the holy word, on every subject of importance to man. The conquerors of half of Europe were

themselves conquered by a handful of Western islanders. Could there be anything more shameful than the Battle of Plassey? It was a measure of the degradation produced by obscurantism.

We had to learn the lesson history had in store for us with sweat and tears. I do not add the word 'blood' because comparatively little blood was shed in India. In Europe of the same period much more flowed. For us to forget these lessons would be, on the part of our intellectuals, a betrayal. Others may play to the gallery. We cannot. If we have learned anything at all it is that the mind must be kept alive and alert in every generation and in every country. It must be honed and whetted every single day. Nothing has been thought out once and for all by some sages who lived thousands of years ago. No savants have made final formulations of solutions to all problems in all circumstances, nor have any law-givers done so no matter how great. Nor have saints, prophets or *avatars*. What they have taught us should not be allowed to circumscribe our efforts to explore Reality further. No community and no nation can make any progress or contribute anything new to the human family as long as it lives in an unreal world. Pre-occupation with the nation or with the community is as harmful as obsession with considerations of *jati* and *varna*. These groupings have been made to serve worldly purposes. Truth is above and beyond such things. The same applies to the Marxists' emphasis on class division and preoccupation with proletarianism. A social revolution may be facilitated by them to some extent but the higher truths will not necessarily become any easier to attain in a society whose mental and spiritual horizons are circumscribed by dogma. Sterility in creative activity in the arts of literature, painting, sculpture, dancing, music and thinking is the consequence of State control over the horizons of human vision. Science and technology may thrive but the Ultimate Reality remains as distant as ever, eternally elusive. Literature and philosophy had reached a dead end just before the Renaissance and were, as we all know, revived and invigorated by the influx of hitherto unknown treasures of the mind that were made generally available by the fall of Constantinople and the migration of scholars to Italy.

Contacts do often lead to conflict but conflict often brings out the best in a man or a country. If no conflict with the British had developed the people of India would not have found the strength to resist, nor would a new and powerful weapon have been discovered by the great soul whose leadership they had the wisdom to follow. The name of the weapon was satyagraha. It is a credit not only to India and the Modern Age in particular but to every human being alive that a man of Gandhi's calibre emerged and gave the world a weapon more powerful than any atom or hydrogen bomb for it changes man from within and helps him to become a better representative of mankind. The liberal democratic traditions of England helped to make a peaceful confrontation workable no doubt but to India goes the honour of providing Gandhi with the Non-violent tradition he drew upon in forging his methods. And how different has been the subsequent peace from that wrought by the bomb dropped at Hiroshima ! But India, while it attained for a time a moral height far above that of the free nations of the world, later plunged into fratricide of a squalor that, at a single stroke, effaced all it had won. But the message survives. People at least know that it was possible to reach such moral heights and resolve a mortal conflict peaceably, without butchery. What was done successfully once, can be done successfully again. The atom of hatred was split.

The British and the Moguls ruled India for approximately the same length of time. The legacy of both is impressive but the British left nothing comparable to the Taj Mahal or other monuments of the Moguls. These have permanently enriched India. British architecture is more utilitarian than beautiful. The churches and palaces they built tended to be replicas or imitations of similar structures in Europe. The impressive High Court Building in Calcutta, for instance, is a copy of a Belgian town hall. The architecture of New Delhi is European in its origin likewise. No attempt was made to adopt or modify Mogul or Rajput or ancient Hindu buildings to modern purpose. The British were probably prompted by a desire to create or recreate an environment with which they were familiar in India and leave a little bit of England behind. What they achieved was perhaps more of a hybrid than a synthesis. But the British were terrified of hybridisation. They were deter-

mined never to make India their home as the Moguls had. They came to spend a few years working at a job, preaching or trading or administering and then retired to their English homes. England was always home to them. Their wives came from there and their children were educated there. What they were able to earn during their time in India went to England and provided for English families there. Nevertheless there are some examples of Colonial architecture from the time of the Company which show a mixture of styles. The Victorians were nothing if not practical and the cost of construction had risen considerably since the early days of the Company when the new capital in Delhi was planned. Its lavishness was much criticised. Lord Hardinge called it a waste of resources, imposing a drain upon a poor country that needed many other things much more urgently. The British conscience pricked where the Mogul conscience did not. No distinction between personal income and public expenditure was made by the Mogul Imperial Treasury. Work on the Taj Mahal was not suspended when famine occurred. Shah Jahan was determined to complete it in all its splendour, cost what it might in terms of human suffering. Many or most of the Rajput or older Hindu monuments were also built by forced labour for that matter. What price glory? This is a question that is never asked by those who live in a dream of a Golden Age of long ago. The autocrats or aristocrats of the Ancient and Medieval periods never lacked cheap labour, sometimes free, sometimes forced. Those of us who have been brought up in princely states have seen how such systems work with our own eyes, even in the Modern period.

The utilitarianism of Britons is to be found in other spheres of art as well where, in fact, they had a hand in its shaping. Few of the sculptures they left are of much artistic merit. The figure of Outram on horseback which was set on the Calcutta maidan is probably as good as any. As for the Moguls, they left no sculpture. The Moulvis forbade the representation of the human form. Even the taking of photographs was regarded with horror for a long time. So whatever treasure India possesses in the way of sculpture is due to the Hindu-Buddhist-Jain practice of idolatry. Utilitarianism has laid its deadening hand upon temples and temple figures also today. These are built

and paid for by Banias. Patronage has passed into their hands. The princes are, if not defunct, no longer forces to be reckoned with. The Banias differ little from their British counterparts. Utilitarianism is the prevailing doctrine in all walks of life, including art. It too came to us with the British part of our heritage, in a mixed bag of good and bad.

The number of Europeans in the three metropolitan cities of India was always small. The British lived in an exclusive social enclave. These, with a few hill stations which they frequented, could not possibly leave a lasting imprint on Indian life and culture. But the English language had a wider range. It was propagated mostly by Indian teachers and its content passed through their hands. In another twenty years or so no trace of the British presence will remain. The institutions they founded or introduced are already on the wane. The entire milieu will be forgotten when the English-educated middle classes are superseded. A few landmarks will be the only exceptions. They will vanish as completely as the Persian-educated Hindu gentry of the Mogul period and the impress of liberal democratic ideas will be eventually effaced. These ideas were, in fact, the best that Britain had to give. By her example at home and by putting them to use in India so successfully through her liberal-minded administrators, educationists, journalists, lawyers and judges Britain passed on a treasure no previous ruler had even bestowed upon this country.

The significance of what they did is becoming clearer as the British phase of our history passes out of our sight. It will soon be out of our minds also. Its meaning is clear. India needed Britain as much as Britain needed India. Britain wanted prosperity and power. India required unification and modernisation. It was not and could not have been a permanent relationship. It was fitting that an honourable partnership within the same Commonwealth of nations should replace it. What appeared to the casual observer to be a long period of degradation was actually a short period of national regeneration, through contact and conflict. The cultural gains of this brief interlude outweigh its material losses. But neither the losses nor the gains should be exaggerated. We could never attain our full stature with others sitting on our backs, approving or disapproving silently or aloud. In such a situation no nation could have done better.



Many have done worse. While we should not exaggerate our achievement we should also be careful not to underrate it. It is doubtful whether India would have fared better during the past two hundred years without the British connection. Neither the Arabas or the Chinese have had such a connection. How have they fared ? To imagine that either the Mogul or the Mahrattas would have voluntarily stepped aside in favour of a united and independent India governed by an educated middle class composed of both Hindus and Muslims through democratic institutions with a leadership responsible to a joint electorate ranging from Peshawar to Shillong and Srinagar to Trivandram is sheer nonsense.

No less an illusion is the attitude that does not regard the Turks and Moguls as historically determined rulers according to the circumstances of the times. The Arabs were ruling Spain during the same period of history, the Turks were ruling Greece and the Mongals were ruling China. India's was not an isolated case. We shall do greater justice to the Turks and Moguls if we think of them as foreign rather than Muslim rulers just as we speak of British rather than Christian rule. The Turks and Moguls held India together and defended it against worse enemies, protected its industries, instructed its troops to keep away from cultivated fields, and patronised poets, musicians and scholars irrespective of community to which they belonged. The policies they followed were state-centred, not dictated by religious considerations. But in the Medieval Period policy and religion were inseparable, in Europe as well as India and if the British successfully separated the two they did it because they belonged to the Modern Period. As instruments of history all India's foreign rulers served certain necessary purposes not otherwise realisable. In each case India was in need of a revitalising change and the change came. We are all the better for these changes.

Our culture now contains strains attributable to European, Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Tibeto-Burman contacts. It is a cosmopolitan culture, very nearly universal in its scope. The Tibeto-Burman elements were added by the Ahoms who invaded Assam from Indo-China and Thailand, in the Late Medieval Period. The Tibetans ruled the territory now known as Arunachal. It is apparent that our culture is not destined to be static. Again and again it has been forced to play a dynamic role in

the life of the people, overflowing eastwards, westwards, northwards and southwards. One must know how to receive graciously in order to give. One who is destined to give must also take. This explains the entire course of India's cultural history. It has been a tale of giving and taking on a wide scale as any in the history of any country. Periods of decadence have interrupted the process but not for long.

Sixty years ago when I was a child I often heard my elders say India has a genius for synthesis. The leading thinkers of the day all thought so and I began life with the firm belief that it was true, that India would arrive at a synthesis between East and West and a synthesis between Hindu and Muslim also. Sixty years is not a long time in the life of a nation and although I have been partly disillusioned by what I have seen. I have not lost all hope that these two dreams will come true in course of time. A third dream is the hope of peaceful outcome to the conflict between Marxian thesis and antithesis. Nothing less can avert a class war in India and perhaps a revolution followed by a counter-revolution. Both may be violent.

I was also told in my childhood that India is characterised by her unity in diversity. Now I find an effort being made to do away with diversity in the name of unity, replacing it by uniformity. India is more like a continent than a single country however and the various parts of it are as different from each other as the nation-states of Europe; France, Germany, Spain and Italy. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnatak, each has its own language and literature and these are as strongly marked as French and German and Italian. The histories of their literatures are distinct. All these distinctive cultures are held together by a central Government which we owe to the Moguls and their British successors. In each consciousness of nationality is coupled with consciousness of a manifest individual character. There is a possibility of this developing into a separate national awareness in course of time if one's mother tongue is made to feel less important than Hindi. These languages and literatures are not less important to their own people. Nationalism in modern Europe is based upon language. While there is still time they must be accepted and given full scope in the cultural field as equals among equals. A national consensus wholly in favour of Hindi and

wholly against English is not yet possible. Meanwhile both link languages must be maintained and cultivated each using it according to his convenience while regional language and cultures develop side by side. Two of our regional languages—Bengali and Urdu—are the national languages of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Tamil is one of the languages recognised by the state in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore. Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu, Kannada, and other regional languages are no less developed and no less national whatever their numerical position may be. Malayalam is one of the smallest, yet it has the highest circulation of books and periodicals per head of the population. The first Jnanpith Award went to a Malayalam poet, Sankara Kurup. If numbers were so important English would not occupy the position it has in the world today. Many of the Indian literatures are being taught in Universities abroad and are given parity with Hindi and English. UNESCO recognises this parity. The Nobel Prize for Literature went to Rabindranath Tagore and remains with Bengali.

As medium of instruction Indian languages may be weak in science and technology but this cannot be a permanent disqualification. It can be remedied. There was a time when European Universities were reluctant to abandon Latin for regional European languages like French, German and English. The German Universities took the lead and others quickly followed. Something similar is sure to take place all over India in the not too distant future. In a few places the process has already begun. Our Knowledge of the world is however expanding at such a rate Indian languages cannot yet cope with it as English can. English is therefore destined to remain indispensable. Learned research papers can enjoy an India-wide and world-wide circulation only in English. But for emotional expression the Indian languages are better suited to the needs of the Indian people in the hands of the poets and story-tellers. A few swallows do not make a summer. Indian writers of English have their limitations. They cannot reach the hearts of the Indian public in the same way or with the same depth as writers in Indian languages. A reading public that is modest in size and unremunerative financially has proved no obstacle.

Delhi now ranks third among Indian cities. Hundreds of other cities, large and small, have sprung up all over the country.

Urbanisation is proceeding apace. Industrialisation is the order of the day. Vast industrial complexes that are cities in themselves are spreading over the countryside. The life lived in these new environments differs radically from the traditional Indian way. Almost all our artists and writers now live in one or the other city. The change is certain to be reflected in their work. The rural scene is portrayed less and less and with diminishing authenticity. The sophisticated public takes little interest in it. *Yatras*, plays performed in rural areas by travelling players, have come to the city and are undergoing modernisation in much the same way as Japanese Kabuki drama and like their Japanese counterparts enjoy a popularity undreamt of by the theatre proper.

As we take a panoramic view of our culture over a stretch of five thousand years one thing becomes clear. Not until the twentieth century did the common people of India come into the picture in a significant manner. They responded to Gandhi as the masses in Russia responded to Lenin, and the Chinese people to Mao. The gap between the commoner and the elite is in urgent need of being closed, as speedily and as gracefully as possible. There is no other way of forestalling a cultural revolution. And standards should not be lowered. Vulgarisation and falsification are not desirable.

Meanwhile we must retain our hold on the wisdom garnered down the ages by our sages and saints and poets and seers. Truth and Love and Beauty and Justice and Courage are not platitudes or abstractions we can afford to dispense with. No life devoid of these eternal verities can ever be worth living. Without life there is no wisdom and no culture to cherish. It is therefore to these that we must turn to find renewal.

The time is long past when we could think of each nation as an isolated unit and assign a separate culture if not a separate civilisation to it. We now face the same vital problems everywhere. The world is drifting towards another war, a nuclear war this time. If the resources of the world are wasted on war preparations there is bound to be underfeeding and overbreeding. Inflation without meaningful production and distribution will lead to an impossible situation ending up in revolution or worse. As the crisis deepens from year to year humanity lives or survives by means of an instinctive faith that all will

eventually be well. Hope that a fresh beginning can be made is undying. To faith and hope let us add charity or the love that Mahatma Gandhi practised in the midst of wild violence. He exemplified the best in India's culture today and the best throughout the four or five thousand years of its history.

As I meditate on the renewal of our culture I regard Reverence for Life as the first imperative. The second is an insatiable curiosity, the desire to *know*. It is in this the West excels. We have need of it, free though we are from its domination. The third is our traditional dedication to Beauty which has made Indian culture so wonderful. No renewal will be complete without Liberty, a fourth element. From it follows Democracy and with Democracy Equality, a fifth ingredient which leads to Social Justice in its turn. We have to look far and wide for their interpretation and application. Other countries started earlier and have gone farther than we have. They are ahead of us. We must learn from their mistakes and do better. We cannot re-live the past. Nor can we duplicate the West. Independence means independence from one's own ancestors as well as independence from foreign masters. Without this twofold independence there can be no renewal of culture. To it we may add a third: the common people's independence from every form of ascendancy over them.

When I speak of the common people of India I include those who are known as tribals. We have owed them a debt of justice since the dawn of our history. Their claim takes precedence over that of the proletarians. It is not less pressing than our debt to the so-called untouchables. They are the descendants of the Pre-Aryans and their very presence in our midst is a constant reminder of our Early Ancient Period. Ours is a country where all historic periods exist simultaneously, side by side. No account of Indian culture can be complete without paying due regard to the contribution of each.

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